PROCESSED WORLD 5

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PROCESSED WORLD

SUMMER 1982, ISSUE 5

MENU

Talking Heads (**introduction**) 2

Letters 4

Sabotage: The Ultimate Video Game 17

Memo Of The Month 28

Poetry 29

Not Just Words... Disinformation 33

Customer Service, Michael Speaking,
May I Help You? 38

Charlie in Videoland 42

Help, I'm Doing Hard Time In the Federal
(or state or county or city)
Bureaucracy (**Tales of Toil**) 50

Fantasies of a Working Girl 53

All of the articles and stories in *Processed World* reflect the views and fantasies of the author and not necessarily those of other contributors or editors.

Credits: Belated thanks to Carioca for her graphic "Air-Conditioned Nightmare" (p. 28) and Lars for his photo of "That Office" (p. 64) in issue #4 of *Processed World*. #5's creators are: Freddie Baer, Sally A. Frye, Linda Thomas, Cookie, Gidget Digit, Helen Highwater, Lucius Cabins, Maxine Holz, Louis Michaelson, Chris Winks, Ernie Parell, Clayton Sheridan, Bernard P., John J., Richard Laubach, J. Gulesian, Michael Anderson, Leslie Regan Shade, Steve Stallone, Jamie, Melinda Gebbie, Susan C., and others...

TALKING HEADS

Processed World *continues to grow, both as a magazine and as a community of rebels from the office and elsewhere. Nearly 2000 copies of* PW *#4 were distributed in the first six weeks after publication. Our biweekly Wednesday night gatherings at a bar in the North Beach district of San Francisco have been drawing new friends, sympathizers and fellow malcontents.*

With the expansion of the editorial/publishing group, differences of opinion have multiplied. While we're all still agreed on the basics — the themes that have recurred throughout past issues and this one — we are divided on certain theoretical and strategic questions.

How to organize ourselves — and for what — is the most crucial of these questions. All of us are extremely critical of the existing labor movement. While some of us feel it can be worked with or within in certain circumstances, others are adamantly opposed to trade unions. We all agree that the revolt which Processed World *has analyzed, chronicled — and, hopefully, contributed to — has to extend beyond the limitations of the workplace into an attack on the entire complex of social institutions and relations we encounter every day. This involves the development of new kinds of organization, reflecting the diversity of experience and circumstances in modern society. Be they termed councils, unions, assemblies, or affinities, these forms could be the precursors to a situation where everyone could decide on the fundamental questions of work, play, creation and enjoyment. The debate on unions continues in our Letters section with an exchange between a former social service worker and present SEIU militant, and Lucius Cabins, author of last issue's article on the Social Service Employees Union. We welcome further contributions on this topic.*

Another sensitive issue — especially because of all the other questions it raises — is that of "sabotage." While the sabotage theme has cropped up in PW *before, often jokingly, this issue's lead article, "Sabotage: The Ultimate Video Game" is the first time any of us has treated this theme in depth. The article has provoked intense debate among us.*

To begin with, the very meaning of the word is in question. Does sabotage refer to any destruction by workers of corporate or state property? Or is it merely the disabling of machines? More broadly, does the term cover (as the old Industrial Workers of the World had it) workers' on-the-job restriction of their own output by whatever means?

Moreover, what is the significance *of sabotage? Some of us, who emphasize the crucial importance of the new data-processing technology to an already-shaky power structure, see sabotage as an essential means to undermining this structure as part of a wider social transformation. A contrasting perspective is offered by those who view the usefulness of sabotage as limited at best, and which, in its individual forms at least, is potentially damaging to collective solidarity by bringing down management wrath on an atomized workforce. Most of us would stress that acts of "sabotage" should be viewed in their specific context — type of work situation, general level and aims of workers' self-organization there and elsewhere — and interpret these acts accordingly.*

These viewpoints alone deserve far more extensive coverage in PW.

But out of the arguments about sabotage have come others: about what kind of world we want (especially its technological base); about what kinds of tactics and strategy are most effective for improving our conditions within the present set-up; and about how such efforts relate to the fight for a new kind of society. The technology question in particular gets another look in this issue with "Not Just Words... Disinformation," a review of San Francisco's recent Office Automation Conference and the trouble we made there, including selected comments from the press. A different slant on the VDT is also presented in this issue's fotonovela, "Charlie in Videoland," a satirical look at kids and computers.

Along with the disquieting story of Charlie and his friend, the Visions and Nightmares department continues in this issue with "Fantasies of a Working Girl" and "Customer Service, Michael Speaking, May I Help You?" Both pieces take off from workaday situations into the realms of the surreal. So, in a different way, do the various poems, most of which deal with feelings of isolation and despondency in the office work-world. Our latest Tale of Toil "Help, I'm Doing Hard Time..." is true-life Kafka, demonstrating just how strange this work-world can be, especially within the labyrinths of the so-called "public sector." Additionally, it provides a useful corrective to currently-popular New Right cliches about why government doesn't work.

* * * * *

We go into our fifth issue a larger, more varied and contentious group, debating many of the same questions that working people have argued about for at least a century and a half. We have in common a dissatisfaction with all of the previous answers. As organizations of office workers outside the traditional unions appear — and PW is just one of them — these debates can only become more widespread and better focussed. PW hopes to go on being one context for such debates. But we would like to see others. Go us one better! And keep in touch!

WE ARE NOT ALONE...

"I just want to let you know I think your magazine is great — really helps me in dealing with the Alienation... I'm a word processor."

L.K.—Oakland CA

"I think your mag is the greatest. I've read all four issues and it sure is nice to know there are some thinking souls out there... I just got canned for exercising 'poor judgement' at Charles Schwab & Co."

S.H.—San Francisco

Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
Keep on all you dissidents and malcontents. You ain't seen *nothing* in the way of job absurdity until you've worked for the State! Someday I'll tell you all about it.

—Petaluma CA

"I myself work in an office (Gov't. of Canada Income Tax Dept.)... my own job involves seven and half hours a day of putting forms into fine alpha-order. Only my apathy towards quality keeps me from being cynical. The alienation is amazing.

D.R.—Toronto, Canada

"Juneau, Alaska is the [state] capital and is probably 75% office workers... Please send 50 copies and I'll see that they get well distributed in all the nooks and crannies of the State and Fed's bureaucracy!

B.R.—Juneau AK

"I am a gift processor (how's that for a catchy title?) at the prestigious institution of higher education indicated on the envelope which I stole from work (office workers have a limited means of sabotaging, I have found, but one does manage to take stamps, typing paper, etc. and use one's typewriter during one's lunch hour to produce subversive material...)

T.F.—St. Louis MO

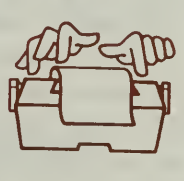
Dear *Processed World*,

Thanks for helping me relax a little bit about office appearances.

I used to be embarrassed about needing even a plain ordinary cushion on my steno chair. Then, when they moved me upstairs and put me in front of the IBM console, it became a rubber doughnut, and now it's two doughnuts on my chair. I was about to agree to embarrassing surgery when I read your last issue of *Processed World*. But I'm not going to worry about appearances so much. I'm going to continue to bring my rubber doughnuts to work, and I don't care who watches me perform this ritual, my putting the doughnuts down and sitting in comfort. If it becomes five doughnuts, they'll have to raise the console because my legs are too long for a shorter chair.

—C.R., Saratoga CA

P.S. The story "Prelude" by Christopher Winks, is a gem. By the way, I thought you had succeeded in helping out Blue Shield. I pictured them sitting back and reading *Processed World* and garbaging the mail. But I'll be damned if their computer still isn't working, because the same day your letter came I received a printout from them about why they couldn't pay for my last two office visits, dammit! Keep trying.



Dear *Processed World*,

Where there is a need for sabotage, it's so easy just to put an Out of Order sign on the xerox machine...

Paper courtesy AT&T.

Love, M (SF)

Dear *Processed Word*,

Your issue #4 gave me more laughs than anything I have read since the IWW pamphlets. You seem to be hung up in your development somewhere in the 20's, where an intelligent being could still believe Marxist bullshit.

Fantasies about sabotaging computers, fighting work quotas and assassinating bosses illustrate your failure to understand what the world is all about. Here are a few pointers that might just help:

1. Jobs are not created to provide employment. They are created to supply a service or product to someone willing to pay for that service or product.

2. All wages, benefits, profits, tools, equipment, supplies, and workplaces must be paid for out of the sales price of the goods or services.

3. If the customer can get it cheaper or better somewhere else, you lose the business (and your job). (This is the "Production for need" you desire, without the bureaucracy your scheme would require).

4. However demeaning and ill-paid you consider your job, somewhere there is someone who will cheerfully do it for half your price.

5. With today's instant communication, it doesn't matter where a company locates the clerical staff.

Denigrate if you must the "Childish" $50,000 a year executive, but realize that it may be only his childish desire to live in Frisco rather than in Colorado or Korea that keeps your job around.

On that great day when you smash the VDT's and hold the files hostage, you will suddenly find as the air traffic controllers did that society is not impressed with your tantrums. It is true that a concerted labor uprising can break a company. It has happened before, and it will

happen again as long as we have people who, as we said in the old army, shit in their own mess kits. But a bankrupt company pays no wages, so where are you?

But if you can't fight business and you can't fight the economy, what can you do to improve your situation? I'm glad you asked.

1. Start out by making yourself worth more to your company than some warm body off the street, then diversify your skill enough to avoid locking in one narrow slot.

2. Your rationalization for ripping off the company is the same one used by the executive for making his secretary fuck for her job. You both feel undercompensated and so you pick up a few extra benefits. Knock it off.

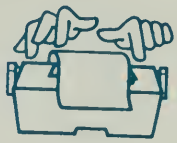
3. When asking for a raise, forget what you "need." Everyone needs more. Talk instead of your proven value to the company, and if they refuse to pay for that, go elsewhere even if it means taking your precious tail onto a paper route or a janitor's job. If you are not worth what you are getting, keep quiet and hope the company doesn't find out.

4. Don't fuck your boss for a raise. Not everyone can do 60 WPM error free, but the chances are that he can hire a better lay. Stick with what you do best, if anything.

If the burden of applying yourself to your job so the customer is assured the best deal for the money does not appeal to you, then fuck, snivel, whine, cheat, steal and bullshit your way through life, because you are nothing but a fucking sniveling whining cheating thieving bullshitter, but keep quiet about it cause we already have more of them than we need.

Walter E. Wallis Wallis Engineering
1954-R Old Middlefield Way
Mountain View CA 94306

We encourage our readers to write directly to Mr. Wallis (send us a copy!). Here's one of our responses:



The idiocies of Mr. Wallis are too numerous to be dealt with here. But the bumptious, arrogant tone of his letter, and some of the half-truths it contains, are worth attention for two reasons. First, they reflect attitudes and platitudes regrettably widespread among workers as well as the like of Mr. Wallis. Second, they express all too accurately the current relationship of forces between workers and business, at least in most of the world. Needless to say, these reasons are closely connected.

Let's begin wth Mr. Wallis' economic notions, which are a cross between high-school Civics text and corner grocer. Mr. Wallis, with quaint stubbornness, asserts that market competition brings about "production for need." The reverse is true. The gap between profitability and real *human need — for properly-grown and nutritious food, comfortable and spacious housing, efficient and safe transport and energy generation, creative and satisfying work — has never yawned wider. Two-thirds of the world's population are badly-housed and malnourished. Seven-eighths of its workforce spend their lives in exhausting, mindless and frequently useless toil. At the same time, vast sectors of the global economy are devoted to the creation and satisfaction of "needs" like armaments, nuclear power plants and the private automobile.*

More compelling are Mr. Wallis' arguments for worker passivity in the face of capital's imperatives. "...You can't fight business and you can't fight the economy," he

crows — because if we do the company will either go broke or leave town. At present, more US companies are going broke than at any time since the thirties, though seldom because of employee demands. Meanwhile, larger corporations are indeed moving their industrial operations to low-wage areas like Latin America and South-East Asia. And in fact, the threat of mass layoffs because of bankruptcy or relocation has been remarkably successful in bringing US and Western European workers back into line.

Traditional labor unions have proven completely incapable of dealing with this — except as active enforcers of management demands. Processed World *is arguing for a new, offensive approach — for breaking out of the legalistic ''labor'' framework and creating directly-democratic, autonomous organization that cuts across the lines of income, occupation and (eventually) nation. Moreover, while Mr. Wallis' class currently has the upper hand, there are encouraging signs. The workers of San Juan, Seoul, Singapore and Soweto are beginning to resist in earnest. What if they were to force the multinationals to pay them San Francisco wages? And in Western Europe, a generation of youth has appeared that is openly contemptuous of the miserable choices offered it, and prefers to fight directly for money, free time, and the space to enjoy both.*

Underlying Mr. Wallis' bullying, patronizing style is the mistaken certainty that working-class people are incapable of constructive *self-organization. He concedes that ''a concerted labor uprising can break a company.'' But he prefers to forget that ''concerted labor uprisings'' have also broken government after government during this century, and have several times challenged the fundamental relationships gov-*

erning this society — the state and the wage system. Over and over again — in Russia and Germany in 1917-21, Spain in 1936-37, Hungary in 1956, Portugal in 1974-75, and most recently in Poland during the last two years — workers have begun taking over social power and running production and distribution for their own purposes — without *a bureaucracy. That these revolutions were "lost," crushed in blood, undermined by their own hesitations and lack of self-confidence, is not the point. The present order* can *be shoved aside by the new, freely cooperative and communal society already latent within it. The means and the necessity for this transformation now exist worldwide, in more profusion than ever before.*

Mr. Wallis, rather than contemplating such possibilities, understandably prefers to give us vulgar and condescending advice on how to "get ahead" in a world marching in lockstep toward the abyss. Let us not regret either his stupidity or his repulsiveness. Both will make it easier when the time comes.

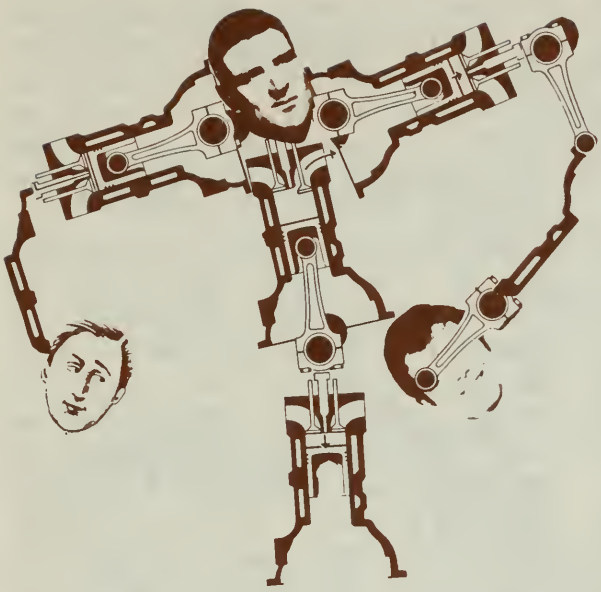
—Louis Michaelson

Dear *PW*,

I would like to submit more observations on the daily life of a middle-aged secretary. It's all very hard, really, that daily life. It so often demands more than I can give and takes so much that my free time is spent trying to establish continuity between who I am and what I must be. Who I am means that I must establish and maintain human relationships. What I must be makes that dangerous and painful. You know how it is. And as they say on the street, you've got to keep three steps ahead because they keep pushing you two steps back.

—J. Gulesian, SF

ALIEN-
ATION
IN CAPITALIST SPACE, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM
© Louis Michaelson 1982
8:34
HELLO. MAY I TAKE A MESSAGE?
THANKS & A TIP OF THE FEDORA TO MELINDA GEBBIE FOR BALLOONS...
& TO GRIEG FOR SPLASH PANEL TEXT
L.M.



Dear *Processed World*,

It's been aeons since I wrote you about the unions — I appreciate your reply and the 2 copies of *Processed World*. I found it lovely, charming, beautiful, painful, tragic, hopeful. I should have responded long ago, but my despondence has superceded my ability to respond; I feel as though I am being beaten senseless.

I appreciate your perspective (i.e. that represented by "P.W.") on the unions — I see a great foresight, and seeking for the truth. I am, unfortunately — (?) — a grasper at straws — anything — to pull myself out of the morass of anonymity of demeaning, slavish work places. I am also a dreamer, my dreams keep me alive in the pit. So when the hopelessness overcomes me, I dream of a little boy wearing a T-shirt that says "Not to try is worse."

—L.T., SF

Dear *Processed World*,
RE: Article in PW #4 on SSEU and the Welfare Department.

As a firm believer that history should be written by as many of those that made it as possible, I feel compelled to speak out my analysis of that huge elephant, the San Francisco Welfare Department of the late 60's and early 70's. I spent 6½ years of my life internalizing and externalizing the many conflicts rampant in that institution where hippies, acid heads, and white middle class radicals represented the Establishment to unemployed minorities, where workers were oppressed by gay and Black supervisors before the rest of the country was out of the closet or ghettos. Where social workers attempted to cut reams of red tape before it strangled them as well.

Unfortunately, it did strangle most of us, to some degree, and it certainly strangled the SSEU which no longer exists. The question is why? What could have been done differently? What did we learn that can help us now?

First of all, let me present my bias. I was in the SEIU, first in Local 400 (the Municipal Employees Union of 8,000), then in Local 535 (Social Service Union). I was politically naive upon arriving on the SF scene, but I had already dismissed the idea of social work being socially relevant back in the Midwest when I saw that the last thing the Poverty Program was set up by the Kennedys to do was to eliminate poverty! Of the poor, that is. I'd never had a health plan, a paid vacation, or a grievance procedure although I was 25 and had worked since I was 16.

In my first month on the job I was confronted with joining one of the two unions: SSEU which was anti-establishment, anti-authority, anti-organization, for individual rights (sounded like Barry Goldwater on this issue!), and gave good parties.

On the other hand there was the SEIU, part of George Meany's AFL-CIO, bureaucratic, in bed with our boss — Joe Alioto, but which did something akin to "collective bargaining," and was responsible for a health plan, paid vacations, and a grievance procedure that even SSEU used and enjoyed. It was to me a choice between power (tho it be corrupt) and "feeling good" (tho not totally un-corrupt). I wanted both. So I joined the SEIU and went to SSEU parties.

During my 6½ years there I joined hundreds of my coworkers (including United Fronts with SSEUers) in job actions, demonstrations, agit prop, and informal occupations. We won things like the right to wear jeans and see-through blouses, bulletin boards, and carved out loopholes for our clients to go through until the then-governor Reagan or the Democrats filled them with concrete. We had fun, we protested, and we enjoyed our after-hour escapes.

As part of the SEIU I went through 3 strikes, watched many SSEUers cross our picket line, while some walked the picket line with us. (They never had an official position on a strike, it would violate their principle of individual decision-making.) We got sold out 3 times, not directly by our union officials, but by their superiors in the Teamsters, Labor Council and Building Trades. We got between 4-9% raises when the cost of living rose 8-12%. Tim Twomey and Gerry Hipps (SEIU bureaucrats) gave up our right to strike.

We started a caucus in Local 400 and tried to change things. We made some headway and lost some ground. We ran for office, got ¼ of the vote, and got kicked out of Local 400 into our "own Welfare Union," Local 535. That meant that 200 of us were separated from 8000 members in Local 400. In 535 we fought Forced Work and could organize on a state level. We tried to get a Joint Council in the four SEIU Locals with representation from the ranks in order to have a chance to meet rank-and-filers in Local 400 and the Hospital Union Local 250.

We leafletted General Hospital before work and found hatred of Tim Twomey comparable to our hatred of bureaucrats John Jeffrey and Gerry Hipps. We made alliances, drank beer, nourished spirits and shared visions. We wanted to build a caucus in each local, kick out the bureaucrats, establish democratic structures and procedures, use the unions' resources to get real contracts, and learn to defend them by militant mass actions, link up with other militants in the Labor Movement, stop AIFLD monies going to Nixon and worldwide juntas who murder our fellow and sister workers, stop the Vietnam War and all other imperialist actions, increase social programs, work out a plan for full employment, end discrimination against all minorities and women. All this by pushing the unions to organize a Labor Party which would bring down the Nixon government like the Miners in England brought down the Tories, and then on to socialism! Workers' control of the whole enchilada! And in our lifetime!

Why did we have such a hard time making the first step? Why don't we still have a contract here in "union town?" Even in Marin County they have a contract, flexible hours, and a caseload maximum. (My caseload literally tripled when I was there!) Why didn't SSEU get a contract, get a dental plan, get caseloads reduced or even agitate for an end to the Vietnam War among workers outside DSS? An SSEUer told me, and that says it all: *"We don't tackle the big issues because we're too small."*

Well, in the SEIU we did tackle

I Love That Man He's No Welfare Scum!

© 1982 Ephemera/P.O. Box 723/ San Francisco, CA 94101

the big issues. An extra $30 a month the SEIU got made a difference in my life. SSEU scabs didn't turn the raises down as dirty pieces of AFL silver! Eventually Local 400 came out against the war in Vietnam and defended Angela [Davis] and the [Black] Panthers. A stand by 8000 paved the way for other unions to take public stands against the government. On the other hand, yes, we were limited in what we were able to do because of the stranglehold of the bureaucracy and its politics of supporting the Democratic Party.

This is my main point: I think we *could* have successfully fought the SEIU bureaucracy in Local 400 if we had 400 unified workers instead of 200 and then 100 struggling in the SEIU while those in SSEU were getting their rocks off on radical highs but changing very little. SSEU in New York City (the model) did separate from the mainstream union movement, but it organized itself and got back inside the AFL-CIO. I never wanted to wear a see-through blouse, and I prefer skirts to jeans. What I wanted and we all needed was a contract with caseload limits, more workers, a dental plan and resources and jobs for our clients. For a start!

SSEU was a diversion, an interesting precursor to the 70's "Me generation." If those 2-300 people had been as interested in communicating and organizing among 18,000 other city workers whose main concern was their working conditions and not their lifestyles and own heads — then we'd be in a hell of a better position now!

If we had had a rank and file takeover of a union of 8000 in 1970-72 what would have changed? For one, Local 29, OPEU in Oakland had a takeover in a union of 5000 in the mid-sixties. They were isolated and had to buck two trusteeships and hostility from the Alameda County Central Labor Council (which continues to this day). They made sweeping democratic changes, took part in the movements against the war, in defense of Blacks, and the women's movement, but they were under incredible pressure to compromise. One other large rank and file local in the area would have been an enormous support for them. Local 250 has had

caucuses rise and fall for 15 years. Local 400 could have inspired them to keep at it. Local 400 could have supported the drive to organize clericals instead of firing every good Business Agent. We could have instituted elected Business Agents and picked them ourselves!

Rank and file control of a large union could have made a difference as far as organizing other workers in SF and winning protection for them, for influencing the rest of the labor movement and society in general. The ranks controlled SSEU, but they were small and basically ineffectual. We needed (in the Welfare Department) to link up with the thousands of our sisters and brothers in Locals 400 and 250. That's where they were. It wasn't and still isn't easy. There is no shortcut or real alternative, like a better international or no international. Otherwise we're starting from scratch, like much of the New Left likes to do, and discard 100 years of experience along with the bureaucrats.

We've come some distance from the days of the Triangle Shirt Workers, sweatshops, the 16 hour day, and child labor. And it wasn't done by individuals. It was through the sweat of collective effort. We've come a long way from the direct militancy of the Wobblies and the unifying sweep of the early CIO.

Judy Erickson was correct. The AFL-CIO *is* business unionism and *is* sleeping with the bosses. But where is SSEU's strategy for "taking it over?" (For that matter where is SSEU?) The Democratic Party controls SF Welfare just as it controls City Hall and the leadership of Local 400. They made a recent decision to lay off 350 Welfare workers due to Reagan's cuts which affect Medi-Cal. All SSEU could do was "unmask authority" and "feel confident in its own ideas." (Smoking a joint will do that!) Understanding and confidence only really matter when they aid us in changing the things that oppress us, especially if they're the "big issues."

In the SEIU we had a strategy, but not enough people then. SSEU had people (in Welfare) but their only strategy was for small changes. SMALL CHANGES MAKE US FEEL BETTER BUT THE BIG CHANGES ARE CRUCIAL FOR OUR SURVIVAL!

Local 400 now has a caucus that is in a position to challenge the current bureaucrat, Pat Jackson. A new, larger caucus is developing in Local 250. There have been two rank and file takeovers of SEIU locals in Massachusetts recently with a combined membership of 17,000. Workers can and are reclaiming their own unions. This will aid the unorganized workers to organize in new ways that can bypass much of the bureaucratic garbage that has held us back so long. Hopefully we all can learn from past mistakes, and at the same time be inspired by our smallest victories!

I hope this discussion continues because it's critical to office workers. How *do* we organize? Spontaneously, in small groups at each work site, or do we join with OPEU, SEIU, and AFSCME to be able to take on wider issues like the need to turn the defense budget into the social services budget, to defend undocumented workers, to run labor candidates instead of voting for the lesser of the bosses' evils, as well as do a good job on our own immediate issues.

If we choose the unions we have a struggle against the bureaucracy. If we choose spontaneous networking, we of necessity limit ourselves to some of our own immediate issues. I think we need nationwide structures to even deal with the banks and insurance companies, as well as the support from all of the working class, including labor, minority and women's groups. But within the larger structures we need a rank and file democracy which encourages the most creative tactics, like the mass grievances and agit prop utilized by SSEU.

—"Dolly Debs"
UNION AND PROUD!

Weelll Heeellllllooooo Dolly,

Thank you for your response to the article on the SEIU/SSEU controversy. First, there are a couple of points of historical disagreement: Burt Alpert (ex-SSEUer) claims that it was due to the direct action of SSEU members that the current grievance procedure was established (not, as you assert, as a result of the contractual bargaining of SEIU), one which allows workers to represent themselves *in hearings and call witnesses and introduce evidence as they see fit, rather than leaving it up to union representatives to "handle it."*

Another point of disagreement lies in your assertion that the SSEU was unconcerned with working conditions, in particular that they did nothing about ever-growing caseloads. As mentioned in the article, the SSEU led a symbolic "case-dumping" to protest the increasing caseloads, and throughout The Rag Times *and* Dialog *there are numerous articles and opinions that dealt directly with a myriad of problems and issues related to working conditions. In fact, you say yourself that the SSEU tended to focus on immediate problems at the expense of the "big issues."*

"SMALL CHANGES MAKE US FEEL BETTER BUT THE BIG CHANGES ARE CRUCIAL FOR OUR SURVIVAL!"

So you say, and this would seem to be the main theme of your critique of SSEU, i.e. that it didn't attempt to deal with the "big issues." According to you, the SEIU did tackle the big issues, which led to a $30/month raise ($75 in contemporary dollars), a public stand against the Vietnam war, and support of the openly pro-Soviet Union Angela Davis. I think it a bit odd that you could term these significant accomplishments. I know people who get equally miniscule raises and don't think it improves their lives at all. Anyway, how long did it last before it was eroded by inflation?

In other parts of your letter, you give the impression that the "big issues crucial to our survival" are approximately as follows:

1. Health plans, dental plans, paid vacations, and grievance procedures
2. Getting "real contracts"
3. "increase social programs and work out a plan for full employment"
4. Gaining power by establishing a "Labor Party" to take over the government and establish "socialism," which would presumably bring about all of the above

While I wouldn't dream of turning down improvements in my material conditions of existence,

and at least some PWers feel they are important on-the-job struggles to engage in, these various issues, to my mind, aren't the "big" ones. In fact, I think you missed the point of the original SSEU and the article describing it: that the biggest issue is the way people deal with each other on a daily basis — the content of social interaction. After that, for us, the point is not to take power through a "Party" and increase the scope and importance of the welfare state, but rather to abolish both centralized power and the state.

You also neglect to deal with the substantive criticisms of both SEIU strikes and collectively bargained contracts laid out in my article through lengthy quotes from SSEU publications of the era. You prefer to call SSEUers "scabs" and to insist that it is the contract that could "limit caseloads, provide more workers, a dental plan, and resources and jobs for the welfare recipients." Frankly, I don't agree. The contract is basically only as strong as the workers it claims to represent. Owners and managers have flaunted contractual agreements countless times. The only real protection workers have is their collective ability and willingness to take action against their employers — which they can do with or without the contract. By now it should be painfully clear that the law is not the friend of the working class.

Then there's your other most important theme, the "what if" theme. What if a militant caucus had taken over the leadership of SEIU 400? Unfortunately, there are all too many examples of union "militants" who get into leadership positions and then proceed to act just like the people they replaced. A couple of good examples are the two leaders of national postal unions, Biller and Sombrotto, who led wildcat strikes in 1970 but are now entrenched bureaucrats presiding over the automation of the postal service. Another good example is the "rank and file" militant Arnold Miller, who became head of the United Mine Workers on the strength of a r-a-f movement and then acted just like his predecessor.

Another example, which you cite in your letter, is that of OPEU Local 29. This local, which still suffers (enjoys?) the enmity of the Alameda County Central Labor Council for its "independence," is the same local which stabbed OPEU local 3 (SF) in the back during the Blue Shield strike (1980-81) by settling for a contract which Local 3 had rejected and was striking to improve. This illustrates another point: no matter how well intentioned or militant a local is, most of the time they act as if they are in a vacuum and take actions which directly undercut other workers.

Unions are set up to do one basic thing: negotiate the terms and (sometimes) the conditions of the sale of their members' labor power. "Militant" leadership faces a myriad of institutional/legal contraints, not the least of which is their isolation in one occupational grouping, geographic area, or nation-state. Invariably, this leads to compromise with the basic setup. Even if a situation existed where a highly motivated, active group of workers abolished paid leadership positions and maintained direct control over their own struggles, it would ultimately be absorbed by the system unless a broader horizontal network between different workers and job-sites developed. And even within such a network, new tactics, strategies and goals would have to be developed.

Somehow you equate doing away with obsolete and oppressive union internationals with the abandonment of 100 years of experience. Union internationals, all of them as far as I know, are in the business of

keeping workers' struggles as isolated as possible and focused on issues that can be most easily accommodated by the status quo. In fact, one could argue that union internationals (and the vast majority of locals, perhaps with rare exceptions) are among the primary institutions that have evolved in this society to obscure the connections between the "big issues" and the "little issues" of people's daily lives.

What's more, you assume that spontaneous networking necessarily limits the nature of workers' struggles to immediate issues, and that this is inadequate. Obviously we disagree on this too. I think that if people are challenging the immediate issues that affect their lives, they will usually find themselves facing the big questions, i.e. the questions of authority, decision-making, and a society based on coercion enforced by the money system.

The overall thrust of your criticisms of the SSEU seems to be that the members should have been less interested in their daily lives. Instead, you argue that they should have joined SEIU Local 400 (even though they were kicked out for being too active on their own behalf), learned to "discipline" themselves by reducing the "chaos" of unlimited positions and ideas on every subject, and directed their energies toward establishing a "labor government" in as many jurisdictions as possible.

You assert that in order to take on the wider issues it is necessary to join OPEU, SEIU, or AFSCME, when it seems obvious that those are the very organizations least interested in seeing workers organizing themselves for things other than union-sponsored demands or candidates. Nationwide structures are useless unless people are taking action that requires coordination on that basis, or (hopefully) on an international basis. Establishing the structure before people are moving to take control over their own lives is a simple recipe for a new bureaucracy, just as oppressive and irrelevant as all the ones we're saddled with now.

Yes, the discussion on how to organize is crucial for office workers, and for the rest of the

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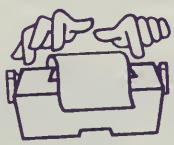
Commuter Crunch

workforce throughout the world. Organizational forms that depend *on the autonomous strength of groups of workers on the job are what we should be seeking, not forms that depend on lawyers, accountants, and bureaucrats. It seems to me that we should be more concerned with enunciating as many visions as possible of directions to move in, in terms of new ways to organize society as a whole, rather than merely trying to exhort people to defend what little they've got.*

True in sports, but even truer in class war, the best defense is a strong offense. And in a time of deteriorating social and material conditions, the best offense is the most diverse and varied one, keeping the authorities guessing about what will happen next — unions don't provide such dynamic possibilities, but autonomous groups of workers, taking action as they see fit, do. Processed World *aspires to be a part of such a movement.*

For Workers' Autonomy,
Lucius Cabins



Dear *PW*,

As I'm writing this I'm overhearing live coverage of the peace demonstrations in NY and SF. It's exciting to hear how many people are out. But it's depressing to hear the old sixties peace leaders and other old guard leader types calling for the old basic involvement in the electoral system. Does anyone really believe that works anymore? I think just the old guard sixties lib-radical types believe that. I wish Barry Commoner and Joan Baez would explain just when we ever get to *vote* on whether we want nukes or nuke power in the first place. We can't vote against nuke war, the best we can do is vote for an initiative (nonbinding) asking Mr. Reagan please to consider not wiping us in a nuclear war. But that seems to be all I hear coming from the radio — that and old Linda Ronstadt tunes... and mothers whining about saving their babies from fallout (for happy, productive lives as cogs in capitalist-electoral society).

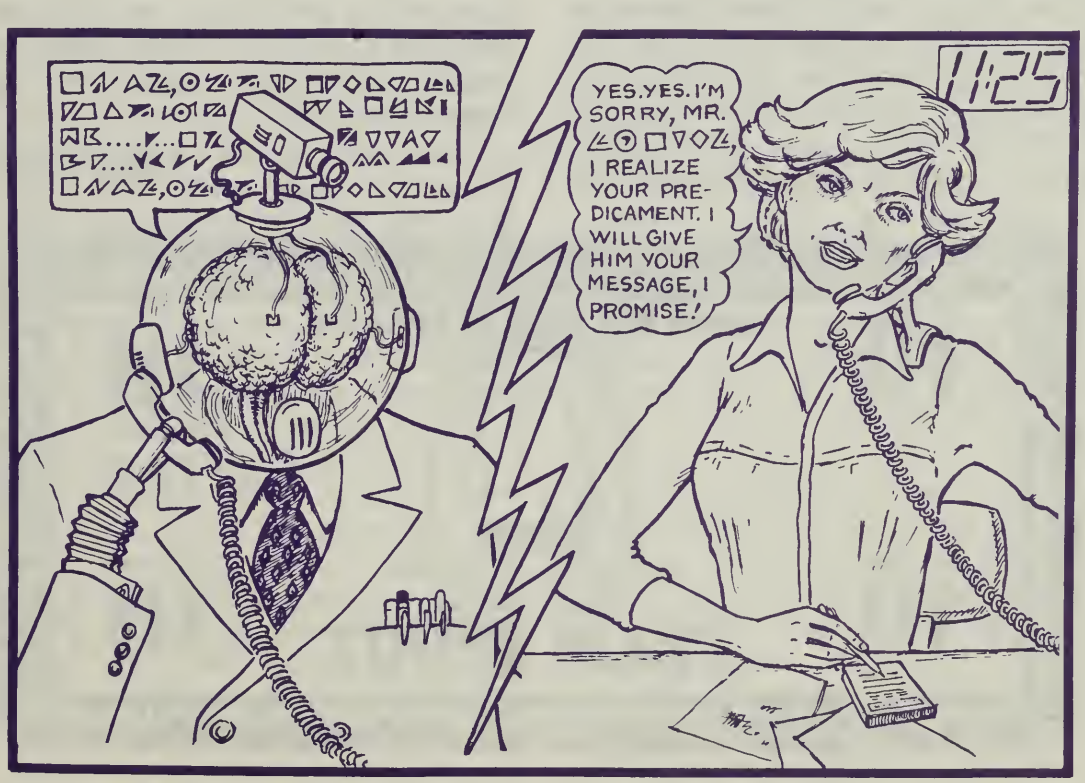
—W., LA

Gidget Gets Fired

PREFACE TO "SABOTAGE: THE ULTIMATE VIDEOGAME"

One year ago the Bank of America offered me a job as a Systems Analyst. Not being a moralist, I didn't feel that my anti-authoritarian principles would be overly compromised if I became an officer of one of the largest and most hated financial institutions in the world. Besides, once inside the belly of the beast I could pursue my other career — i.e. professional anti-authoritarian revolutionary. While designing property management database systems I could drop hints to my co-workers about a "world free from authoritarian domination and exploitation." Without being dogmatic, condescending or jargonistic, I'd convince others of the desirability of a "classless, stateless society where decisions about daily life are made by those most directly affected by the consequences of the decisions," meanwhile making sure not to neglect my duties in providing technical assistance for the department's office automation project. I'd pass out copies of Processed World, *I'd never cooperate with management, I'd always support my co-workers in their fights with the supervisors. Perhaps one day we'd take over the data center and take control of the Bank's assets. From such experiences people would become "capable of coping with social problems in a direct and conscious way, beyond present day 'needs' like the maintenance of profits and power structures."*

I did carry on my shadow career by



participating in Processed World. *In fact, that's how I got caught with my theory of sabotage showing. More precisely, I left a copy of the following article "Sabotage: The Ultimate Videogame" on my desk at work. One of the people who I should have convinced long before of the desirability of a new world found it, and turned it in to the VP of Personnel Relations.*

Subsequently, I had a meeting with the VP and was asked to comment on the article. Despite my attempts to turn sabotage into something harmless he meted out a punishment of a week's suspension. At the end of that week I was fired. In the formal document explaining my dismissal he stated that it was too risky to have a person who advocated and condoned sabotage working around expensive equipment that stored critical financial data.

Of course, it's not surprising that I got the bounce. Everyone knows that the Bank of America is a repressive institution. My firing is more interesting in what it reveals about me.

There was a subtle dissimulation in the way I presented myself to the people I worked with. I'm sure most of them were shocked when they found out why I was fired. After having worked there for a year only a few people knew that I consider myself a radical. Virtually no one was aware of my past political involvements or that my ideas about what's wrong with the world didn't spring full blown from the CRT screen. My problem wasn't that I failed to convince people but that I was dishonest.

This same problem extends to the way Processed World *handles the question of who we are as a group. "Office dissidents," "malcontents," "nasty secretaries" are all vague ways to respond to those who inquire about our politics. Like me, most of the members have definite political backgrounds that stretch back for years. (This is not to say that* PW *is a monolithic political organization. While we all consider ourselves anti-authoritarian, we differ from each other substantially in our political points of view — See Talking Heads.)*

Our relationship as marginals, radicals and "revolutionaries" to the people we are approaching should be analyzed. Perhaps if I had been more open about my ideas at Bank of America I wouldn't have been so isolated when I got caught with my theory showing.

—Gidget Digit

Awarded to Gidgit Digit for Outstanding Service to the Bank — 1982

SABOTAGE!: THE ULTIMATE VIDEO GAME

by gidgit digit

What office worker hasn't thought of dousing the keyboard of her word processor with a cup of steaming coffee, hurling her modular telephone handset through the plate glass window of her supervisor's cubicle, or torching up the stack of input forms waiting in her in-box with a "misplaced" cigarette? The impulse to sabotage the work environment is probably as old as wage-labor itself, perhaps older. Life in an office often means having to endure nonsensical procedures, the childish whims of supervisors and the humiliation of being someone's subordinate. It's no wonder that many of us take out our frustrations on the surroundings that are part of our working life.

The current upsurge in the use of computerized business machines has added fuel to the fire, so to speak. Word processors, remote terminals, data phones, and high speed printers are only a few of the new breakable gadgets that are coming to dominate the modern office. Designed for control and surveillance, they often appear as the immediate source of our frustration. Damaging them is a quick way to vent anger or to gain a few extra minutes of "downtime."

Sabotage is more than an inescapable desire to bash calculators. It is neither a simple manifestation of machine-hatred nor is it a new phenomenon that has appeared only with the introduction of computer technology. Its forms are largely shaped by the setting in which they take place. The sabotage of new office technology takes place within the larger context of the modern office, a context which includes working conditions, conflict between management and workers, dramatic changes in the work process itself and, finally, relationships existing between clerical workers themselves.

POWER AND CONTROL IN THE OFFICE

Once considered a career that required a good deal of skill, the clerical job now closely resembles an assembly line station. Office management has consciously applied the principles of scientific management to the growing flow of paper and money, breaking the process down into components, routinizing and automating the work, and reserving the more "mental" tasks for managers or the new machines.

The growth and bureaucratization of the information-handling needs of modern corporations and governments has changed the small "personal" office into huge organizations complete with complex hierarchies and explicitly defined work relationships. No one is exempt from being situated in the organizational chart. The myriad of titles and grades tends to inhibit a sense of common experience, since everyone else's situation seems slightly different from one's own. Each spot on the hierarchy has its privileges and implied power over those below it, and its requirements of subordination to those above. This

social fragmentation is all the more alienating because it occurs within the context of a supposed social equality. There is a pretense of friendliness among all office employees regardless of their rank. This "nice" atmosphere works conveniently to legitimate the hierarchy. If it seems that everyone is equal and has an equal chance to climb the ladder, the ladder itself appears as the emblem of this "equal opportunity." All this makes for an extremely subtle set of power relations.

Rather than through raw confrontation, power is reinforced by imbuing the entire office terrain with its symbols through things like dress, the size of one's desk or work space, and "perks." In such a setting, people may try to reduce their powerlessness by playing the game of privilege or forming alliances with those more powerful than themselves. Indeed, this type of behavior is almost required for survival in a typical office.

In addition to these implicit power relations, many offices (especially the larger corporations) have formalized

Mr. Wilson, Mr. Witter says he was only joking. The Depression hasn't started yet.

procedures to handle open conflict when it occurs. Most of these companies have personnel departments that try to mediate between managers and their underlings. While most people recognize these substitutes for unions as biased at best, there is often no alternative, especially when collective action doesn't seem possible. This process of taking complaints up the hierarchy is the reflection of the power cliques and manipulation that hold sway on the more informal level. As such, it indicates the conscious attempt on the part of management to undermine any workers' initiatives to organize autonomously, reinforcing the hierarchy as the only legitimate framework for work, conflict, in short for all aspects of social life.

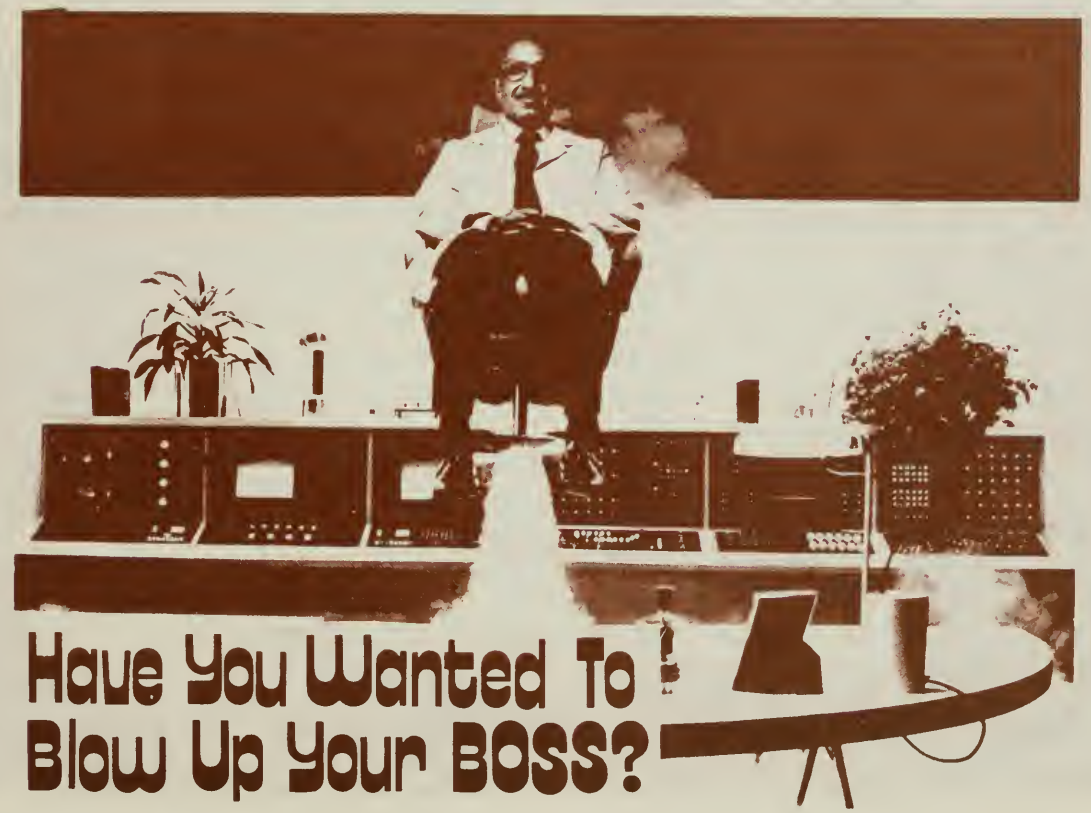
OFFICE CULTURE VS. OFFICE HIERARCHY

Given the stifling atmosphere of office life it is easy to see why white collar workers have rarely developed organizational forms (like unions) but have relied on different techniques and strategies to oppose both the reorganization of their work and the introduction of new technology. Despite the constraints imposed by

bureaucracy, an informal office work culture subverts the "normal" office order. Activities common to this culture often encourage a feeling of comraderie and collusion among those who practice them. For example, many clericals have become adept in manipulating the superficial friendliness and can get away with what might otherwise be considered insubordination. I recently worked with a woman who regularly called one of the managers "der Fuhrer". Since she was known around the office for her abrasive personality her behavior was accepted. While this type of "joking" does not really undermine the basis of a manager's power it creates a potentially subversive community of those who are amused at seeing a bureaucrat insulted to his face.

Other normal daily activities in the office also contribute to the subversion of office order, e.g. making free use of xerox machines, telephones, word processors, etc., for personal uses rather than company needs. "Time-theft," too is a widespread form of normal anti-productivity behavior — extended breaks and lunch hours, arriving late, leaving early, reading the paper on the job, etc.

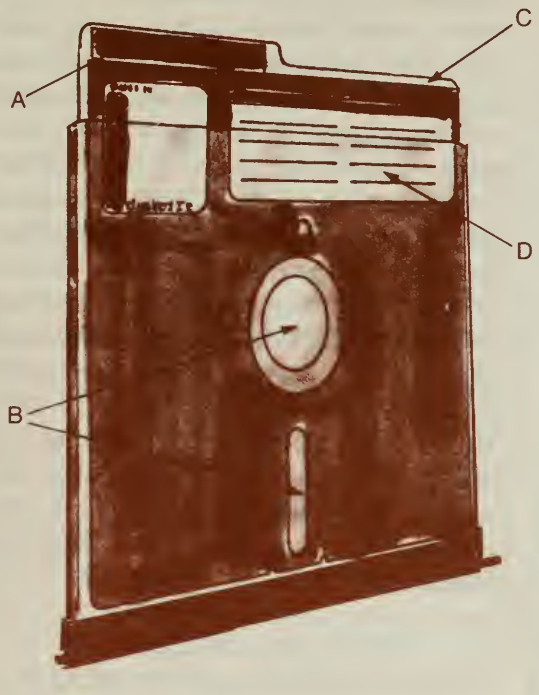
Pranks can also be disruptive to the normal routine. For example, at Blue Cross of Northern California (where I worked as a temp in 1974) there were a few hundred VDT operators. Each operator had a set of procedures to follow to bring her terminal "up," after which the words "Good morning, happiness is a sunny day!" would appear on the screen. No key entry clerk is in the mood to see that at 7:30 AM. One morning someone in the notoriously weird claims input department figured out how to change the program that ran the start-up procedure. When the 250 or so terminal workers powered on their machines that morning they were greeted with the more pleasing "Good morning, happiness is a good fuck!" On top of being good for a laugh, it caused management to shut the computer down until a systems analyst came in and fixed the program.



WHITE-COLLAR OPPOSITION: THEFT, SABOTAGE AND STRIKES

Beyond the daily "fun and games," there are more serious forms of resistance to the office routine. Theft is perhaps the most well known. However, it is often not recognized as such, largely because the media dwell almost exclusively on executive embezzlement schemes. Shaped by the nature of the work itself (the large flows of money that many clericals deal with daily), the breakdown of the close relationship between clerk and boss that formerly existed, and the rip-offs that the use of computers has made possible, white collar pilfering is another response office workers have developed to compensate themselves for lousy wages and bad working conditions. It is responsible

DISCS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE OFFICE FUN!



A. Mix-up color tabs for new abstract-color filing system

B. Creative etching with paper clips, pens and staples

C. Hold this edge and flip across office: Office Frisbee is the best way to Keep Fit!

D. Brighten up your co-workers' day by writing stories and jokes on labels.

for an estimated 30 to 40 billion in losses per year with computer crime amounting to about 10 percent of that total.

White collar crime is usually associated with a more highly skilled stratum but, in fact, access to a firm's databases motivates even those who possess minimal technical knowledge to dabble in "creative computing." A teller at a New York savings bank was able to steal money from depositors' accounts and then cover his tracks by shifting money among several other accounts by making phony computer entries. Perhaps what is most interesting about this example is that it demonstrates the ease with which clerks and others who have access to on-line systems can destroy or alter information. In fact, "info-vandalism", whether committed by disgruntled employees, high school pranksters or left-wing direct action groups is increasing at a rapid pace.

Computer industry journals are filled with articles and ads dealing with the stability and security of information stored electronically. Legislation has recently been introduced that would make tampering with such data a federal crime. And, in a frantic scramble to protect their digital blips, businesses have come up with a whole range of precautionary measures. They range from physically protecting the hardware against magnet-waving maniacs to encoding devices and password functions that shield the data itself.

So far, these efforts have not been adequate. There have been several cases of employees vindictively erasing important accounting data. In one instance, an overworked computer operator destroyed two million dollars of billing information that he didn't have time to enter into the computer. In France, a programmer, irate about having been dismissed, wrote a "time-release" program that erased all the company's records two years after his dismissal date. Others who have been terminated by their com-

panies have entered information to give themselves large severance or pension payments.

Perhaps more threatening than isolated instances of thievery and pranksterism to companies using data processing equipment is the possibility of strikes or occupations by office, communications and computer workers. While destruction and theft are more common, the more classic forms of "labor problems" do occur among this sector of the workforce. In February of 1981 the workers of British Columbia Telephone occupied their workplace in a unionizing drive. For six days "Co-op" Tel operated under no management. Technical workers and operators cross-trained each other in order to maintain telephone service during the action. In England last spring, computer programmers in the civil service struck for higher wages and completely stopped the flow of the government bureaucracy's life-blood (i.e. documents, memos, vouchers, data). While these acts of collective sabotage do not take place very frequently, they demonstrate the possibility of using computers against their intended function.

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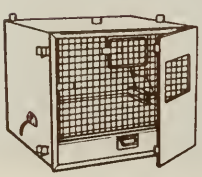


Harford

Metal Products, Inc.
Building 101

BUSINESS PRIORITIES: AUTOMATED IRRATIONALITY

One might wonder why government and business are pursuing computerization with such fervor, especially if the technology is so vulnerable. Speed and efficiency (read: increased productivity) are some of the standard reasons given in response to this question. Certainly more irrational elements also come into play. There seems to be an absolute mania for this technology regardless of whether it pays off in higher profits or productivity. Many business execs assume it will even though there have been no thorough investigations into this question.

Whatever individual corporate execs think they're doing, on the level of society as a whole it is clear that a vast restructuring is taking place. Whole segments of the economy are being shifted from older unprofitable industries (e.g. auto, steel) to the dazzling information sector. This necessarily changes the details of our daily lives. Robots, word processors, and communication networks are only a few of the new machines that are part of the modern information-based society.

According to liberal businessmen, futurists, and computer enthusiasts a new office will emerge from the use of the new technology which will reduce regimentation at work. Remote terminals, they argue, will allow people to do their work in their own homes at their own speeds. While this vision has serious flaws in itself, it is unlikely that management will relinquish control over the work process. In fact, rather than freeing clerks from the gaze of their supervisors, the management statistic programs that many new systems provide will allow the careful scrutiny of each worker's output regardless of where the work is done. Decentralization, assuming it happens at all, will more likely bring about the reintroduction of piece-work, while breaking down the type of work cultures discussed above that contribute to the low productivity of office workers.

Outside the workplace, such things as video games, vidotext, cable TV and automatic tellers, seemingly benign objects in themselves, increasingly define our leisure time activities (watching various types of television screens for the most part). The individual "freedoms" that are created by the technological wonders of tele-shopping and home banking are illusory. At most they are conveniences that allow for the more efficient ordering of modern life. The basis of social life is not touched by this "revolution." As in the office it remains hierarchical. In fact, the power of those in control is enhanced *because* there is an illusion of increased freedom. The inhabitants of this electronic village may be allowed total autonomy within their personal "user ID's", but they are systematically excluded from taking part in "programming" the "operating system."

These vision of computer utopia have come about in response to the wide-spread bad attitude that many people have toward the "smart" machines. When computers were first introduced for such things as billings and phone lists people's immediate response was one of resentment at what they perceived as a loss in

Sabotage...

It's as simple as pulling a plug...

power. Who hasn't had the experience of battling an "infallible" computer that kept charging you for the same shirt, lost all your college records or disconnected your phone call for the fourth time. The point here is not that computers don't work but that this new technology provides authorities with a shield for their power. The frustration and powerlessness that people feel can conveniently be blamed on computer error.

Computers used to automate social life have also been made the objects of sabotage. Everyone has probably heard a version of the story about the irate housewife storming into the nearest PG&E office to do summary justice to a guilty computer with a shotgun. Incidents of sabotage that contain a "social critique" have also taken place. In 1970 an anti-war group calling itself BEAVER 55 "invaded" a Hewlett Packard installation in Minnesota and did extensive damage to hardware, tapes and data. More recently (April, 1980), a group in France (CLODO — The Committee to Liquidate or Divert Computers) raided a computer software firm in Toulouse, destroying programs, tapes and punch cards.

In the first case attacking a centralized source of information was a way to both protest and sabotage U.S. involvement in the Viet Nam war. The French group which had many computer workers as members, went further, condemning computers for warping cultural priorities as well as for being the preferred tools of the police and other repressive institutions. The implications of the repressive and socially negative ways in which computers are used need to be explored. However, in their emphasis on massive destruction, groups such as the above direct themselves too much against the technology itself (not to mention those groups' authoritarian internal structure). They do not pursue the positive aim of subverting computers, of exploring the relationship between a given technology and the use to which it is put. In this sense, pranks and theft, often carried out spontaneously and almost always individually, are more radical than the

actions of those who group themselves around a specific political ideology.

All of these tendencies, the pranks, stealing and destruction in offices, strikes and occupations by computer workers, and spectacular bombings and arson attacks by left-wing groups imply a common desire to resist changes that are being introduced without our consent. The technology that has been developed to maintain profits and existing institutions of social control is extremely vulnerable to sabotage and subversion, especially in this transition period. If we are to avoid an alienated electronic version of capitalism, in which control is subtle but absolute, we will need to extend the subversion of machines and work processes to an all out attack on the social relations that make them possible.

Processed World is collecting in-house xeroxed and/or mimeographed newsletters, cartoons, humor sheets, satirical memos, anonymous barbs, etc. for an article on horizontal communications on the job. Send us whatever you find around your office that fits this general description...
Processed World, 55 Sutter St. #829, San Francisco, CA 94104, USA

Transamerica

Real Estate Services

Transamerica
Real Estate Management
600 Montgomery Street
San Francisco, California 94111
(415) 983-4100

TO: All Pyramid Tenants
545 Sansome Street
701 Montgomery Street

FROM: Building Office

SUBJECT: Financial District Intruders

It has been reported that people passing themselves off as employees are active in the financial district for purposes other than work.

Here in the Pyramid, elevators are being used by this group for drag races between the floors. Rather than allowing others to routinely enter, the intruders push our personnel out of the way, while at the same time shout: "I'm four floors behind A.J. Foyt and have only two minutes left to catch 'em before my lunch hour ends!"

Another member of this group, an elderly black woman carrying a shopping bag, poses as a member of Sanitary Services. She carries hundreds of tampons in this bag, and says she is refilling empty dispensers in the Women's Room on each floor. However, Security has found these items jamming the mail drops and stuck in the pen holders on the desks of our top management.

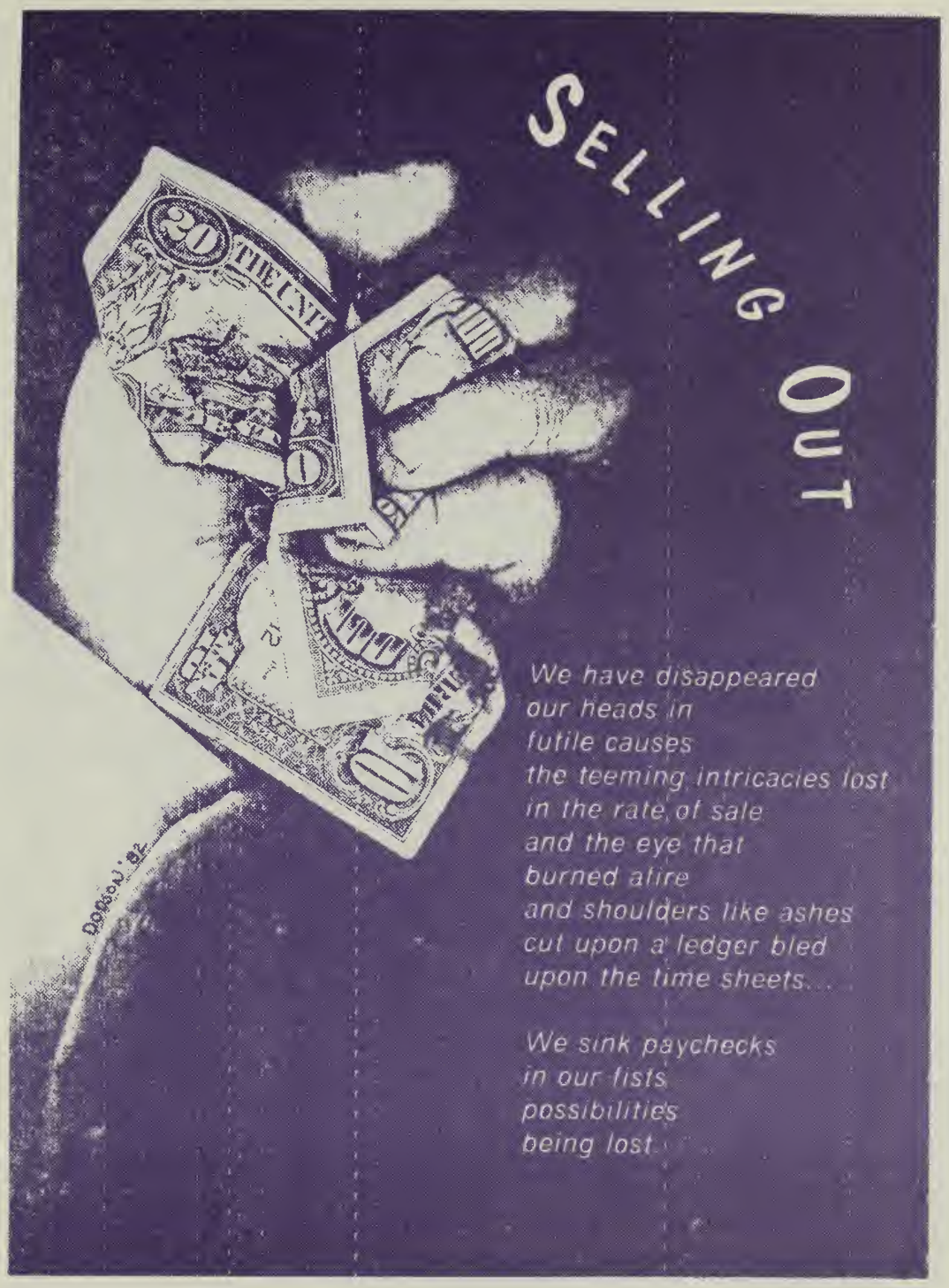
Counter-measures to curb these rebellious trends are being implemented throughout the financial district.

In this building, we are taking the following steps which, we hope, will begin to trim back the intruders' access to weapons and their arenas for action.

As of August 1, all employees will use elevator service only in the accompaniment of a partner, to be selected by Security. As for sanitary items in the Women's Room, the Pyramid will be switching to Maxi-Pads and sponges on the same date.

You may experience some inconvenience from these changes. Please bear in mind that the real intrusion comes from others who will not perform their jobs, and who make a mockery of this enterprise. Your cooperation with this initiative is requested. Thank you.

POETRY



by Sally Frye

Heaven at 5

qualifying statement
& 7 Black Beauties
The Void of Annual Report
Senseless Paper Work
Silly Dictaphone
Vacant as hell
5 days a week
& heaven at 5

Joe

processed god

I am not Memorex
just the three in one

come, take this silicone chip
upon your tongue

and you shall be with me, this day
in Paradise

no matter what Dow Jones might say
or what the heathens cry

ye all shall prosper well
although the times are lean

so long as you repent
and tend to my machines

MH 5/82

THE TEMP EMPLOYMENT SHUFFLE

back into being fired.
or did I hire onto that one
increasingly long ago
when I was ungrown,
dispatched, renewed, spit-out,

mangled by temporary
typingpools, malingered in calling
-in-sick w/ excuses
garbled like phonelines
and transitional, like images,

leading back w/in
extemporaneous letters of
introduction: to a mind
plugged into blown circuits
old as gaslamps

and fireflies in moonshine.
reexamined in parttime vacuums,
Caesar's discharge,
when I was insubordinate,
substantive, green, pitied,

ingrown w/ no nail
nor claw (scuttling nowhere)
indignantly alone
on off-gray wall-to-walls and
palm plants shining

in reflectors like
obese selfconscious secretaries
downturned pug-noses
snorting cheap scents
behind the boss's ear,

as though
they were last-hurrahs

John Barker

Bookkeeper's Lament

What I've wanted is to turn the desk around
facing the window, and my wonderful view,
I would have soared with my machine.
But remembering scolding teachers saying
"don't day-dream, don't look out the window"-
I've been reluctant to invade territory that isn't mine
upset another's symmetry... break rules.

What I've done is to have kept my back to the window
and my beautiful view has gotten only cursory glances
from me and my machine has kept on humming, joining
its voice with the voice of the city... drowning out mine.

But I've spoken out a time or two, raising my voice above
the din, in protest, in supplication: No one listening,
back to the routine, keep your nose clean.

What I'm doing is walking straight into another kind of hell
Hell never really disappears, it just changes faces—
What I have to do is find an end to the never-ending Word-
Bitter word, Bitter Work, Do I have enough money to pay
my bills
I wonder
as I pay anothers bills with anothers money.

City Poem For a Girl w/ No Windows

O to be downtown on the day of New Year's Eve
when calendar pages sweep the air
when office girls in sweet abandon
throw their anxious, dreary days in fistfulls
from the window.

The girl with no windows
places before her
the pages, the endless days
that lied and lured her life to sleep
Her fingers tear them one by one
as if in dream
She doesn't stay to watch the trash
carried to the street.

by Laurie Davis

OFFICE

i
Spy with me
on this train going nowhere,
while the ice-age advances
without pity.

Watch me watching
green numbers dancing,
their thin paper tresses
curling to the floor.

See my eyes light up
when I put somebody on hold.

ii
The lunchroom meets the lunch truck
with the secret handshake
in a noonal landscape of burrito wrappers
and apple cores.

iii
These crisply cornered walls,
these tinted windows looking out into
windows that look from crisply cornered walls

The man who designed
this room, these rooms,
is surely somewhere
wealthily out of his mind.

iv
Twoish. Slowish.
Man overbored! Man overbored!
Quick someone, toss him a life-saver,
or maybe a candy bar.

v
I am an alien in the heart of matter!
No matter.
I work and work and get further behind.
Furthermore, I'm eating less and getting fatter!

I'm so excited, can't wait to phone
the wife:

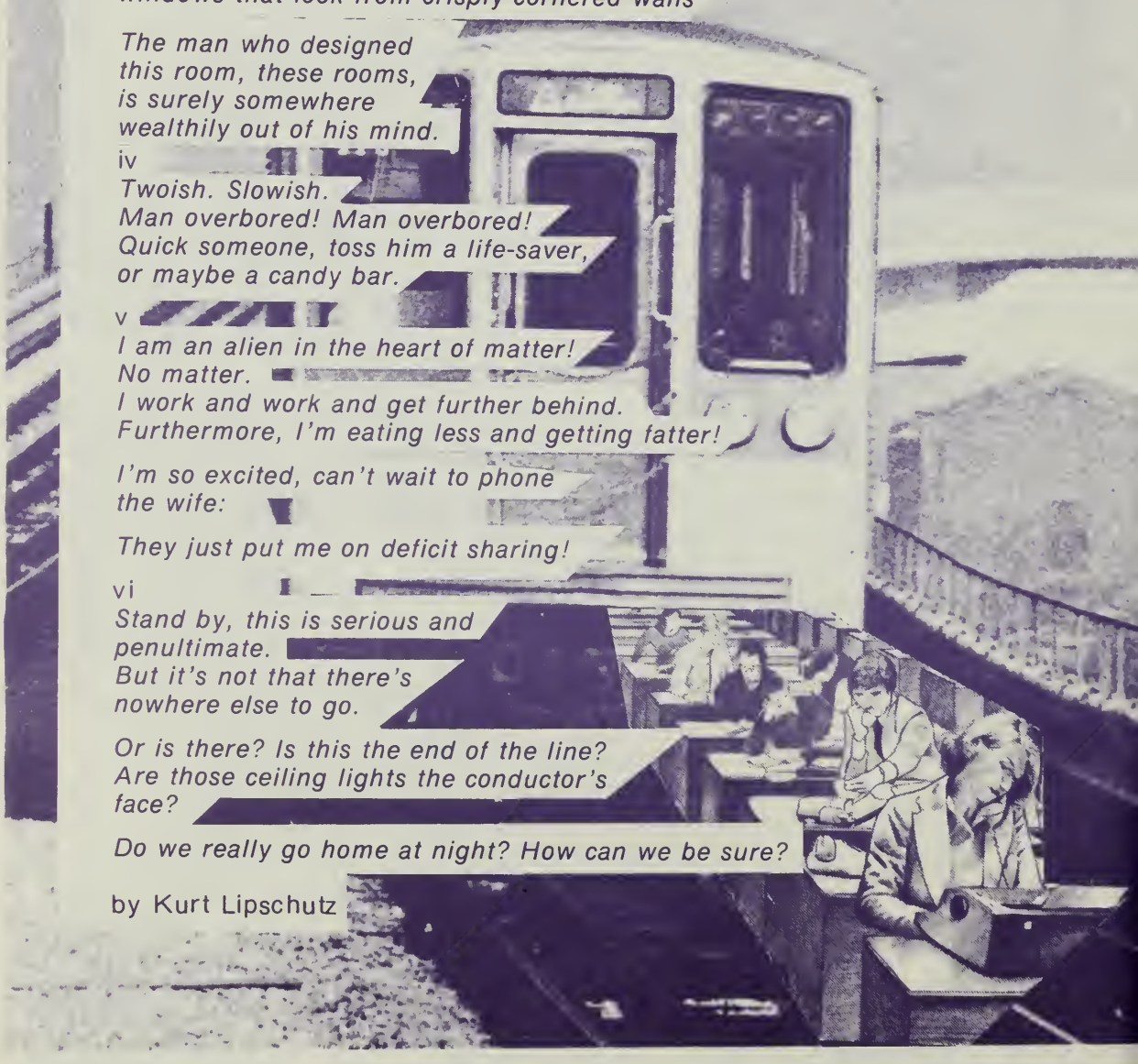
They just put me on deficit sharing!

vi
Stand by, this is serious and
penultimate.
But it's not that there's
nowhere else to go.

Or is there? Is this the end of the line?
Are those ceiling lights the conductor's
face?

Do we really go home at night? How can we be sure?

by Kurt Lipschutz



The office of the future is coming soon to a business near you. This was the message of the "Third Annual Office Automation Conference" held at San Francisco's Moscone Center April 5-7 by the American Federation of Information Processing Societies. No sales were allowed on site. The event was aimed at providing the public with an opportunity to experience the wonders of the new technology. Vendors spent a lot of time trying to convince office managers that they really *needed* all the fancy gadgetry. The OAC was part of an ongoing propaganda campaign designed to sell an *image* of technological bliss which the information industry will supposedly provide.

Fantasies of cool, hygienic hi-tech efficiency everywhere victorious used to be linked in the mass media with justifiable fears that people would become automatons in a Brave New World. Now such fantasies are being presented as the inevitable and universally beneficial thrust of "progress." A striking example of this is the Wang TV commercial, which assures us that "the future looks even brighter" while a lab-coated woman takes notes from a bald, androgynous head on a giant Advent screen.

The appeal to corporate leaders is clear — the catchwords are efficiency, productivity, reduced labor costs. But other promises are held out to the office workforce — the much-heralded elimination of routine work, we are told, meets the needs of an increasingly demanding and skill-oriented workforce:

"As routine office tasks are taken over by machine, the remaining work tends to be more intellectual."
[*"Managing Human Factors in the Automated Office," by John J. Connell, Executive Director, Office Technology Research Group, in* Modern Office Procedures *3/82*]

"Today's office is marked by a gradual movement to break down barriers between technological haves and have-nots and to distribute powers of data processing and word processing equipment throughout the office workforce." [*ibid.*]

The disparity between this democratic daydream and the real consequences of technological "innovation" at the workplace (see *Processed World* #1) is the theme of a growing number of critics — office workers, writers and academics who have experienced or observed the new work environments.

"... the office of the future looks very much like the factory of the past, the way it's being implemented. There's nothing at all new about shift work, piece work, which is what pay per line of information is. Or pay by keystroke, homework, that's a step back into the Middle Ages, if you ask me, and into the cottage industries."
[*Karen Nussbaum, President 9 to 5 National Association of Working Women, in* Computerworld *5/3/82*]

FOLLOW THE LEADERS!

Attend interminable workshops by "acknowledged industry leaders" where you will listen to hours of vague rhetoric on ridiculously esoteric specialization within the realm of personnel control and information manipulation.

EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

about the rapidly changing world of information technology and its efficient use in controlling your workforce. Learn how to implement schemes to garb this restructuring of the office work process in the guise of "Quality of Work-Life" and "job enrichment," even while your control seems to grow and grow.

JOIN YOUR PEERS

in pretending that somehow human life will be improved by the unceasing growth of data creation, storage, and retrieval... and join them in working to obscure the fact that what little individual freedom there is, on the job and in leisure time, is being quickly eroded by the expansion of modern communications (esp. surveillance) capabilities.

First Church of

Information, Scientist

THE THEME

THE HUMAN PROBLEM: That's the vital theme of the 1982 Office Automation Conference. Several different program emphases give you the choice of focusing on what you want to learn more about.

THE PROGRAM

1) **Individuals in the Automated Office:** How can they be convinced to perpetuate their self-delusions that they are doing something meaningful?

2) **Organization and Management Concerns:** How can the proletarianization of middle- and low-management be effected? How will a shrinking workforce and increasing concentration of data handling responsibilities increase the vulnerability of your company to sabotage?

3) **User Interface and Usability:** How can thinking, feeling human beings be molded to do routine tasks over and over in front of TV screens? What is the **right** combination of fancy hardware, user-friendly interfaces, "nice" office decor, and productivity measurement techniques? How can users be prevented from interfacing with each other instead of with their terminals?

the third annual
OFFICE AUTOMAT ON CONFERENCE
APRIL 5-7, 1982 SAN FRANCISCO
MOSCONE CENTER

"Among the subsidiary benefits management expects to derive from [office automation] is... the squeezing out of the minutes and hours of labor power lost in the personal relations and contacts among secretaries and between secretaries and their 'principals' — which is what they mean when they speak of the 'end of the social office.' " [Labor & Monopoly Capital *by Harry Braverman (1974 Monthly Review Press — New York)*]

Even the industry itself has been forced to recognize the dehumanization and heightened levels of anxiety, tension and physical stress associated in particular with the installation of CRT "workstations."

" 'The Human Connection' theme of the conference assured buyers that the industry does care about people and reiterated that "people" (i.e. managers) develop and interpret policies, strategies, design and allocate resources and implement systems. If there was any thread of continuity throughout the arrangement of booths, it was how "people" were to fit in. 'User Friendliness' was the reassuring nostrum salespeople strained to emphasize." [*L. Gieselman, union activist, commenting on the OAC*]

Recently, the more sophisticated glossies such as *Modern Office Procedures* have been filled with articles and ads devoted to the wonders of "ergonomic design." "Ergonomics," originally a synonym for biotechnology ("The aspect of technology concerned with the application of biological and engineering data to problems relating to man and the machine") is offered as a magical solution to the miseries experienced by office workers using the new technology:

"The electronic systems work with great rapidity to produce information instantaneously. To cope with these demands alertness and vigilance are essential. The concept of comfort must be examined: comfort not as a goal of ultimate ease, but as sufficient ergonomic support for alertness." [Mod. Off. Proc., *op.cit.*] "Because it is ergonomically designed, real people in real business situations can work more comfortably, efficiently

and therefore more productively." [*Wordplex advertisement*] "You've invested heavily in hardware, software and well-trained data processing staff. Yet your productivity is lagging. What's wrong? Perhaps the problem is seating." [*Operarts ad*] "We've engineered the anxiety out of computers." [*Data General ad*]

Of course, as these quotes clearly show, the industry's real concern is not to adapt the new technology to workers' needs, but to ensure that workers adapt more easily to the oppressive conditions the technology creates. But just like the mouthwash ad that claims Brand X will solve your romantic problems, ergonomics hype grossly exaggerates the ability of designers to make bearable, let alone enjoyable, the ultra-intensified and -routinized work which is the *real* promise of office automation.

Most likely, the industry also anticipates worker resistance of a more active kind than "lagging productivity." In Europe, a number of white-collar unions have put up at least token resistance to "rationalization" via VDT's and microprocessors. Similar if more muted noises have been heard from U.S. unions too. As a rule, such opposition to office automation targets two problems: the loss of jobs and the heightened alienation and lack of control over the work process. In response to the first problem, the most common demand is for "upgrading" of displaced workers at company or government expense, to allow them to find their own slots in the ever-expanding New Information Order. In response to the second, arguments are made for "humanized" work processes and "enrichment" schemes which allow workers more control over their jobs — flextime, work sharing, "encounter"-style meetings with supervisors — in other words, workers will be allowed to make all the decisions that change nothing. Meanwhile, office work's actual *content* goes completely unquestioned.

While eyestrain, backache and general systemic stress from exhausting work schedules are serious problems, there are more serious problems still, which existed in offices

processing people
New Levels of Function!
An Image Problem
Not just words... Information
The problem of user resistance may continue throughout the lifespan of a company's OA system.
The revolutionary alternative
Recommended remedy for recurring filing headaches.

long before automation and which automation is only bringing to the explosion point. These problems are what *PW* and a handful of other critics have begun to address. Dissidents associated with *PW* were present at the Office Automation Conference to make our views known. We distributed 1000 bogus "programs" inside the Conference [reprinted here] and staged a costume picket line out front.

To many, perhaps most of the data and personnel management types present, our critique was essentially invisible: "What are they protesting?" "Er... ah.. computers I guess — Automation." "Wha' — they wanna do everything by hand?" [*Eavesdropped conversation between two businessmen in the registration line at the OAC*]

Some of the industry tabloids came closer to the truth — partly because they bothered to ask:

" 'Office Automation is for Automatons,' 'IBM=Intensely Boring Machines,' 'Data Slaves.'

"These and other slogans handpainted on placards carried by demonstrators greeted lunch-time strollers outside the Moscone Center. The demonstrators were members of a local organization (so informal that it has no name) that consists of about 20 secretaries and programmers who volunteer their lunch hours to protest office conditions in particular and work in general." [Computerworld *4/12/82*] And *Infoworld* was hip enough to add: "As bizarre as the protestors were outside, the action inside the show was surreal by comparison."

All the same, the ruling image-makers have things so well in hand that the terrifying absurdity of most modern work still seems normal to most people, and "technology" remains an unstoppable Monolithic Monster to be embraced or blindly rejected. For us the real point is not to do office work less speedily or more safely, or to have more say over how it's allocated, nor even — in the long run — to get more money for it. The real point is: why do it at all? What is the *purpose* of all this office work?

From our perspective, the vast majority of information recording, storing and exchange is thoroughly useless, except to maintain the coercive power of corporations, governments and the money economy generally. It's not enough to oppose automation merely to protect jobs or to preserve current levels of worker control over tasks. The implementation of *profitable* technologies has never been halted by merely defensive opposition. To be effective, opposition must take the offensive, asserting new ideas about how society might be run better and with vastly less work, and devising new tactics for subverting authority.

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A FARCE IN ONE ACT

CUSTOMER SERVICE, MICHAEL SPEAKING, MAY I HELP YOU?

[*SCENE: Michael, a "temployee" with San Francisco's infamous White Slavery Temporary Agency, is riding the elevator to the 16th floor of 525 Market Street where his phone system, a computer screen and microfiche reader await his arrival. He is tired and irritated today because he was awake all night writing this play. He overhears two other temployees, a young man wearing faded jeans and a girl with chopped hair, discussing their employment with Wells Fargo's credit card customer service department. They are also headed for the 16th floor.*]

SUE: I talked with this one bitch yesterday, she said her reputation was ruined when her charge was declined at Gumps. I said, "What reputation?," and released her.

TED: That's a good one Sue. I had this old guy call up from San Jose, a physician, and he wasn't satisfied with Wells Fargo's policy so he told me that he could buy and sell me. Can you imagine?, "Young man, I have enough money to buy and sell you," he said. I told him that I wasn't the kind of "man" he was accustomed to buying and selling. I also told him that when the revolution comes I was going to drive to San Jose so he could be the first one I shoot. Then I released him.

[*NOTE:* Release *means* hang up on *in Wells Fargon.*]

[*The other elevator riders—a man wearing an expensive suit and holding a sheaf of declined loan applications, a woman in her early thirties wearing a gray business outfit and carrying a pot of coffee and five cups, a Hispanic cafeteria employee and a friend riding the elevator to hide from her boss, and a fat, white, old Wells Fargo security guard with a loaded .38 policeman's special—all look at the two blasphemous temployees with dismay, then stare vacantly at the blinking numbers. At 16 Michael, Sue and Ted debark.*]

MICHAEL: You could have been shot in there! They don't take kindly to dissidence. Especially when you work with computers.

SUE: We're both getting terminated today, I overheard my supervisor talking to her boss yesterday. They're getting reports that we're being rude on the phone.

MICHAEL: Are you?

TED: Only when people start gibbering about their precious credit being jeopardized.

SUE: Or when their accounts are closed because they didn't make their payment in time.

TED: Or when they want immediate action even if it takes every bank employee in the whole building.

MICHAEL: Right. Or when they call up and demand to speak to a supervisor first thing...

TED: ...and if you can't handle it yourself—in other words, lie and get them off the line—then your supervisor resents you for the remainder of your employment.

SUE: Actually, I'm rude only about 82 percent of the time. The other 18 percent of the time the folks are bearable. At least they realize that banks hire temporary employees to answer customer service phones because they're cheap labor and they are an effective information block when the bank screws up and steals the customer's money.

[*A Supervisor approaches the group. "You should have been on the phones two minutes ago!" she screeches. The temployees scatter like beetles. Michael goes to his cubicle. The CRT screen reads: THE APPLICATION WAS REJECTED BECAUSE OF A FAILURE IN THE SYSTEM*]

MICHAEL: Shit, the computers are down again. [*he signs onto the phone system and puts the star unit over his ear*] I love this. [*He makes himself available for incoming calls. The gate opens and a call comes in*] Customer service, Michael Speaking, May I help you?

CUSTOMER: Yes, my number is 5.. 4.. 1.. 0.. 3.. 7...

MICHAEL: Excuse me Ma'am, before you give me your number, I should tell you that our computers are down...

CUSTOMER: Which means?

MICHAEL: Which means that I can't help you right now.

CUSTOMER: I've been on hold for fifteen minutes mister, and I want something done about my statement right now!

MICHAEL: I can appreciate that you've been on hold but there's

nothing I can do. I can't even tell you your owing balance.

CUSTOMER: I want to speak to your supervisor!

MICHAEL: I'm sorry Ma'am, my supervisor is going to tell you the same thing that I'm telling you. She's on her break right now anyway.

CUSTOMER: Then I want to talk to your supervisor's supervisor! I want to speak to the head of the department!!

MICHAEL: I'm sorry Ma'am, he's in a meeting...

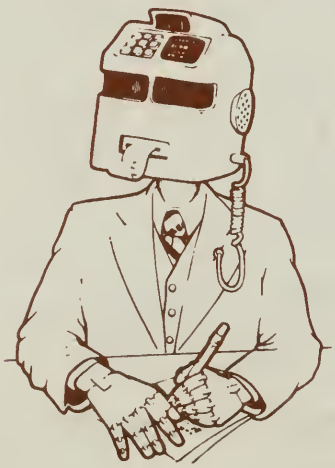
CUSTOMER: I don't want "sorry" from some snotty-nosed asshole with no brains, I want to speak...

MICHAEL: Goodbye, Ma'am.

[*Michael releases the customer. He is depressed by this first encounter. The day has begun badly.*]

MICHAEL: [*Crossing to Ted in the cubicle next to his*] She called me a snotty-nosed asshole with no brains.

TED: [*He holds up his hand to indicate that he is talking to a cardholder*] ... Yes.. I understand that Ma'am, that's why they're called double charges. You've been charged twice for the same item due to a computer error. All you have to do is write us a letter asking us to remove the double charge, otherwise it will show up again on your next statement... No, we can't just do it over the phone... I'm sorry.. Yes, I understand that your time is very valuable... That's right, a signed letter.. O.K., Thanks for calling.



[*Michael gets a drink of water. He sees a Supervisor ask to see Ted and Sue in her office.*]

SUPERVISOR: The seasonal overflow of customer calls has receded according to our call-counting computer so I'm afraid that you will have to be terminated as of this afternoon.

[*Ted and Sue laugh in her face. Sue goes to the woman's room to smoke a joint. Ted erases several cardholder's addresses in the computer, then starts a small fire in his wastebasket. Suddenly there is an announcement over the highrise loudspeaker.*]

ANNOUNCEMENT: Please evacuate the building. This is an emergency. Please leave via the exit nearest you.

[*The lights fade as Michael follows Sue and Ted through the emergency exit. Michael smirks.*]

MICHAEL: You really shouldn't have pulled that alarm Sue. You'll probably be fired for this.

SUE: Heavens.

[*An apparition arises out of the corner of the now vacant office. It is HUSBY, GOD OF CREDIT.*]

HUSBY, GOD OF CREDIT: I can see you all, cowering at your desks, issuing bad checks, writing stupid letters about how you've lost your jobs, sold your junky cars, borrowed money from your goofy brothers in Toledo. Don't think I'm fooled by this chicanery... You there, Bob McDonald in San Diego. I saw your wife buy that dinette set yesterday. You know damn well that now you're way over your limit. We're not a charity buster, that'll be one over limit charge, thank you very much... And you, Helen

Troy from Grand Island, Nebraska. I don't care if it is 10 degrees below zero, you can't afford that new fur coat. Just clean the ratty pullover that's sitting on the floor in your closet. After all, you're only a vapid secretary... What's this I see, an application here from a certain Billy Dong in New York City. Look fella, I realize that they told you before you left Cambodia that this is the Land of Opportunity, but we don't issue VISA cards to dishwashers. If you want it bad enough, I suggest you either go back to school and study computers or send that knockout wife of yours over to 14th and Broadway for some quick cash. [*The apparition takes on a reddish tinge and becomes more adamant*] Now let's get to the hardcore... Miss Collins, I see here that you've moved a total of twelve times without leaving a forwarding address. Not nice Miss Collins. I guess it's time to attach the ol' wages. You'll be hearing from our tribe of bloodthirsty lawyers... All right, what's this crap with Mr. W.S. Grinder from Spokane? He has seven accounts for his salesmen but he still refuses to pay the business fee?.. Hmmm.. Can you say "Jail" Mr. Grinder?.. How about "unusual experiments?" Can you say "untold beatings" Mr. Grinder?.. What? Oh, so those business fees don't seem so bad now Mr. Grinder? Good, we'll expect a check in tomorrow's mail.. [*The apparition begins to fade*].. I'm sorry Mrs. Flinder, but now that your husband is dead we're going to have to close your account.. I don't care if you've been with us for thirty-five years, that's *THE POLICY*... and Joel Smith, I'm afraid we won't be able to replace that card for at least three to thirteen weeks. I know it's getting close to Christmas, but... [*Husby, God of Credit fades away*]

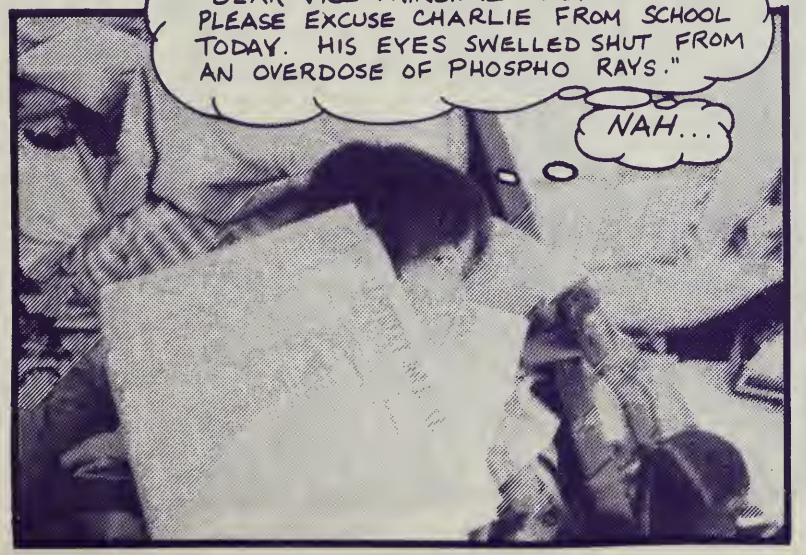
BLACKOUT

HI HONEYPIE. LISTEN, I HAVE GOT TO DO AN EMERGENCY JOB, BE GONE 'TIL SEVEN. CAN YOU DO THE SHOPPING AND PICK UP THE KIDS? OH, ALSO, CAN-
NNAARGH!
RRZ⚡▽⊙
GGHHRNN
GGLARDAMYU!
RRROOWW!
Mike
THE END?

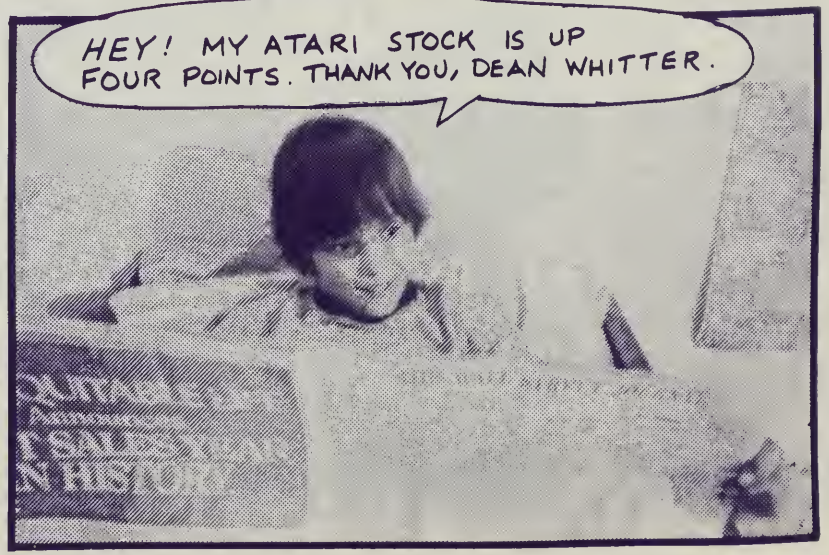
Asari Corporation

presents

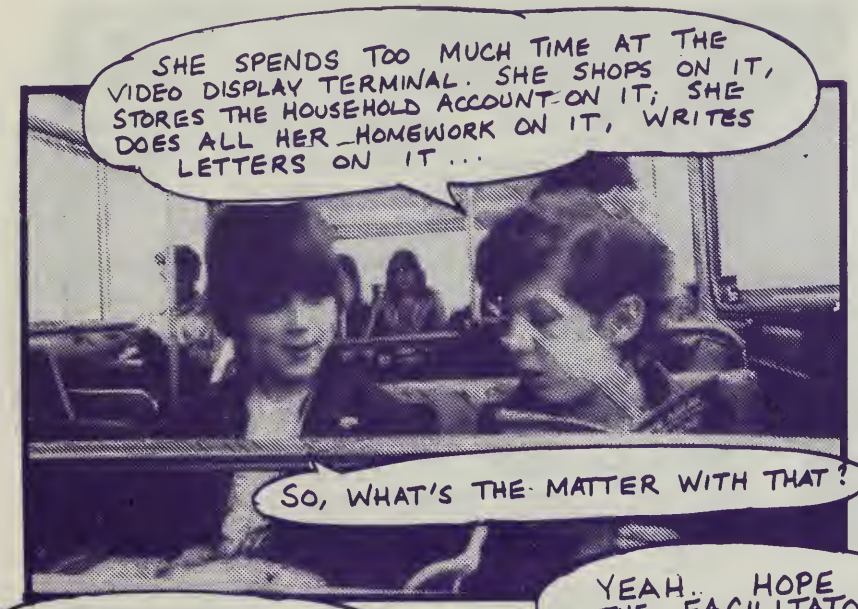
Charlie & JOSHUA IN VIDEOLAND


"DEAR VICE PRINCIPAL WRADSHOE: PLEASE EXCUSE CHARLIE FROM SCHOOL TODAY. HIS EYES SWELLED SHUT FROM AN OVERDOSE OF PHOSPHO RAYS."
NAH...

"CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN!--THE FASER BANKS DOWN; WE'RE OUT OF PHOTON TORPEDOES! YOU DID THIS SPOCK, DIDN'T YOU? DIDN'T YOU!
WAKE UP CHARLIE. TIME FOR SCHOOL.
"EXCUSE ME CAPTAIN, I THOUGHT IT WAS MY TURN..."

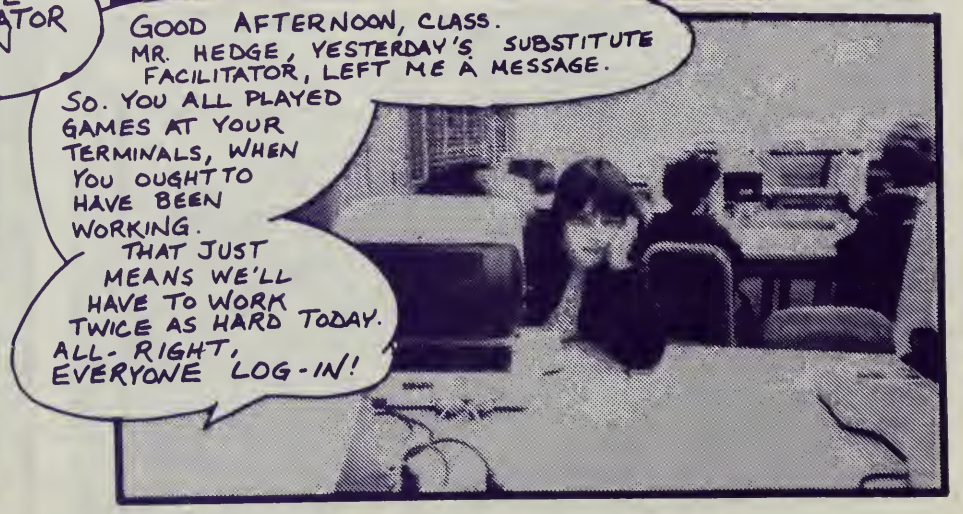


HURRY UP CHARLIE. YOUR WHEATIES ARE GETTING SOGGY.
"HEY! HOW 'BOUT A NICE HAWAIIAN PUNCH..."
"SURE..."
BYE, SON. PHONE ME IF THEY KEEP YOU AFTER SCHOOL.
OH, SURE DAD. SAY, I TOOK A COUPLE OF DOLLARS FROM YOUR WALLET, FOR LUNCH. .... SO LONG.
JOSHUA. THE SEAT OF THOSE CORDUROYS LOOK ATROCIOUS. I'M GETTING YOU A NEW PAIR FROM SEARS.
AND SOME NEW T-SHIRTS. THEY'RE ON SPECIAL.
AND A CASE OF IVORY SNOW. .....AND THEN... ...LET ME SEE...
BYE MOM.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT MOM, CHARLIE.
WHY, WHAT'S WRONG?


SHE SPENDS TOO MUCH TIME AT THE VIDEO DISPLAY TERMINAL. SHE SHOPS ON IT, STORES THE HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNT ON IT, SHE DOES ALL HER HOMEWORK ON IT, WRITES LETTERS ON IT...
SO, WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THAT?

SHE DOESN'T WATCH T.V. ANYMORE.
HMMM. SOUNDS BAD.

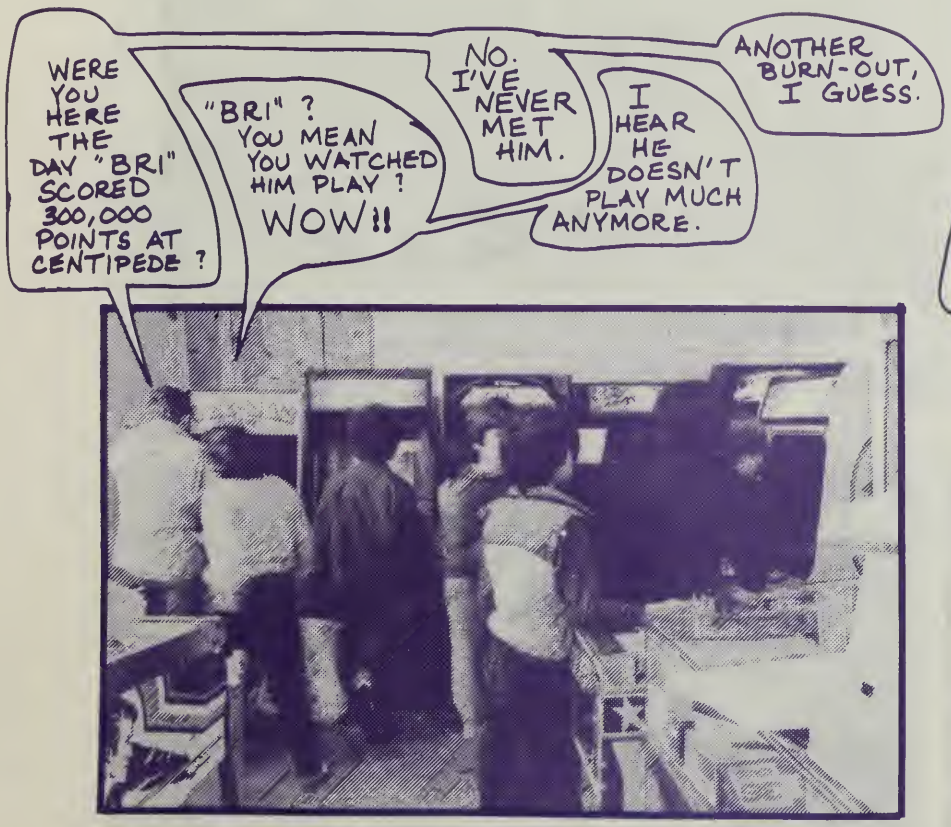
YEAH. HOPE THE FACILITATOR IS SICK AGAIN TODAY.
WELL, SEE YOU IN FUNCTIONS CLASS.

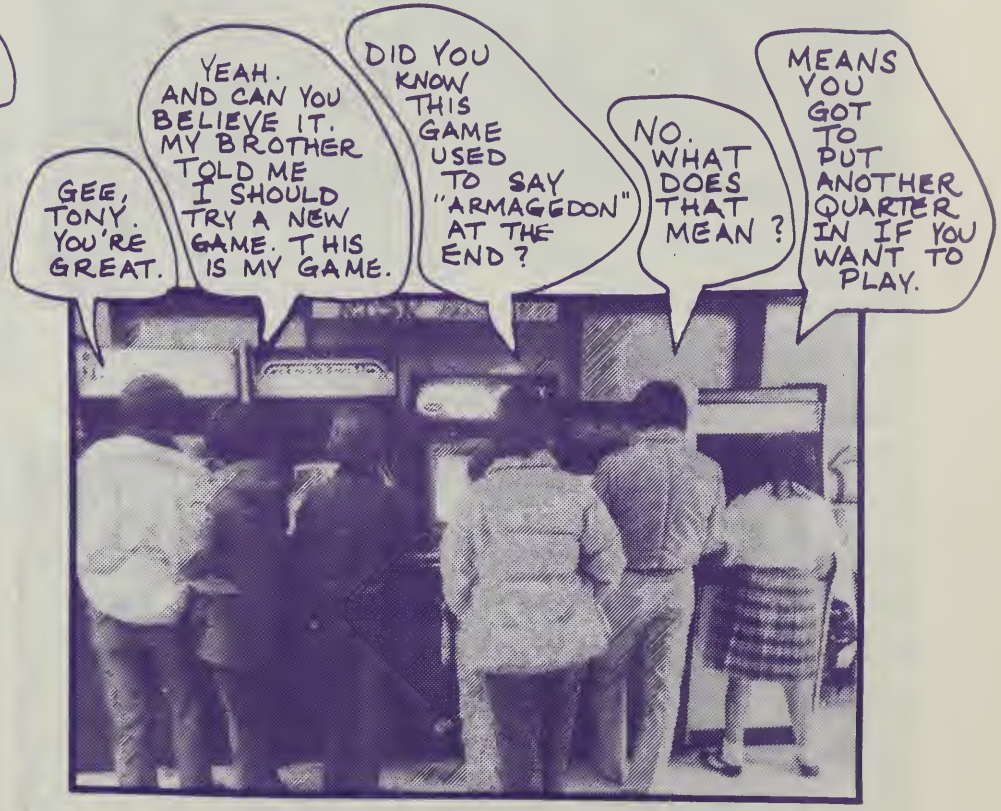

GOOD AFTERNOON, CLASS.
MR. HEDGE, YESTERDAY'S SUBSTITUTE FACILITATOR, LEFT ME A MESSAGE.
SO. YOU ALL PLAYED GAMES AT YOUR TERMINALS, WHEN YOU OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN WORKING.
THAT JUST MEANS WE'LL HAVE TO WORK TWICE AS HARD TODAY.
ALL-RIGHT, EVERYONE LOG-IN!

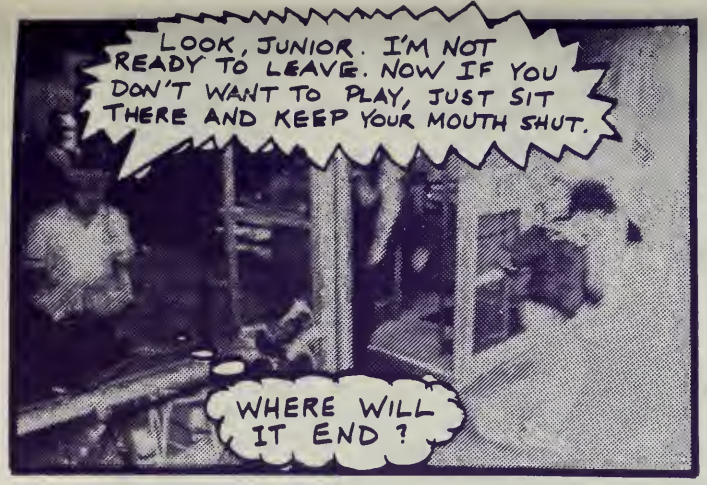
PSSST. CHARLIE. I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO SEE THE DERIVATIVE FROM MY LAST CALCULUS QUIZ...
LET'S SPLIT FOR THE DAY AND GET IN A FEW GOOD GAMES.

MINUTES LATER

I'M EATING LIGHT THIS WEEK.
YEAH. ME TOO.


WERE YOU HERE THE DAY "BRI" SCORED 300,000 POINTS AT CENTIPEDE ?
"BRI" ? YOU MEAN YOU WATCHED HIM PLAY ? WOW!!
NO. I'VE NEVER MET HIM.
I HEAR HE DOESN'T PLAY MUCH ANYMORE.
ANOTHER BURN-OUT, I GUESS.


GEE, TONY. YOU'RE GREAT.
YEAH. AND CAN YOU BELIEVE IT. MY BROTHER TOLD ME I SHOULD TRY A NEW GAME. THIS IS MY GAME.
DID YOU KNOW THIS GAME USED TO SAY "ARMAGGEDON" AT THE END ?
NO. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN ?
MEANS YOU GOT TO PUT ANOTHER QUARTER IN IF YOU WANT TO PLAY.

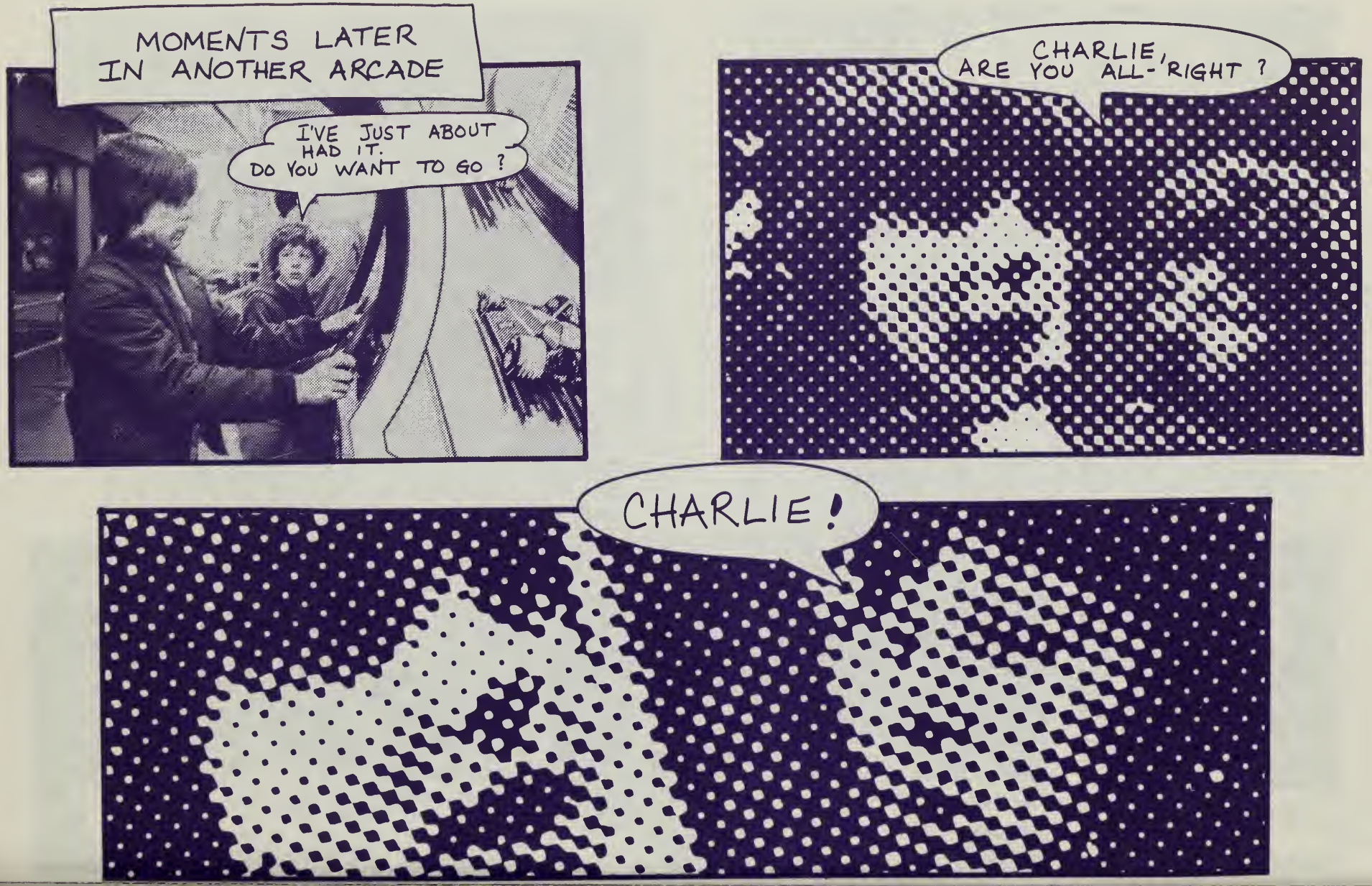

LOOK, JUNIOR. I'M NOT READY TO LEAVE. NOW IF YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY, JUST SIT THERE AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT.
WHERE WILL IT END?

OKAY! TODAY WE BUST THE PAC-MAN.

WELL, THAT WAS FUN. WHERE TO NEXT.

OH NO. I'M OUT OF CASH.
SHIT! ME TOO. C'MON. I'VE GOT AN IDEA.

I'M SURE DAD WON'T MIND. JUST A FEW BUCKS. HE WON'T EVEN KNOW IT'S MISSING.
LET'S GO!!
WHY DON'T THESE THINGS PAY OUT IN QUARTERS!


MOMENTS LATER
IN ANOTHER ARCADE
I'VE JUST ABOUT HAD IT. DO YOU WANT TO GO ?
CHARLIE, ARE YOU ALL-RIGHT ?
CHARLIE !

CHARLIE, COME BACK!
THE END

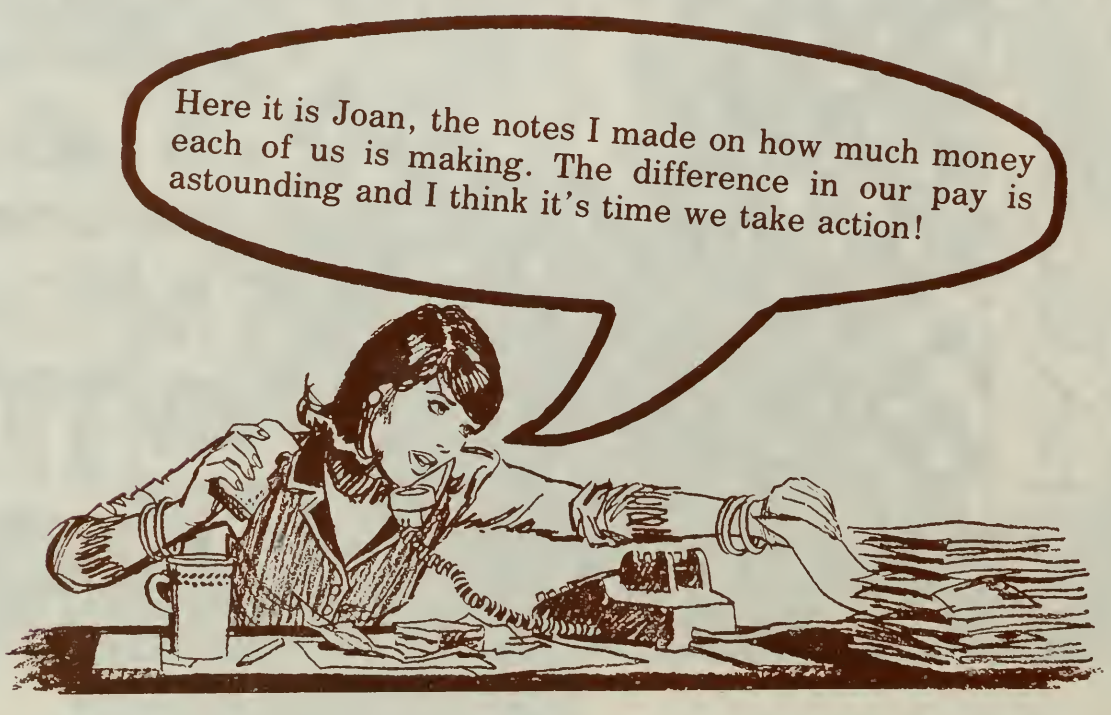
TALES OF TOIL

Help, I'm Doing Hard Time in the Federal (or state or county or city) Bureaucracy

George Orwell MUST have worked for the government at one time. How else could he have known so much about doublethink, or the fact that 2+2=4 when you're talking about engineering but 5 when you're talking about the budget.

We were sitting around the bar talking after (during?) working hours, talking about a promotional exam we had to take. Jerry (all names are naturally fictitious) said how part of the exam was to see if you could write logical, terse, to-the-point paragraphs. I said that they should have selected people who could write paragraphs that were as ambiguous as possible, so that when policy changed with changes in administrations, no one would be embarrassed. Susie added that she would have picked people who could mention as many supervisors' prejudices as possible, without offending any of them. This is one organization where they pay good money (taxpayers' money, remember?) to send you to school to learn how to write, and then shitcan your letters and documents because they're too honest. "That isn't the way we do things. So-and-so doesn't like that word."

I could handle it if it was the ordinary business bullshit. What gets to me though is that this is supposed to be an agency that has some responsibility toward enviromental protection, and although they glorify it mightily in all their statements of policy, the truth of the matter is that


Here it is Joan, the notes I made on how much money each of us is making. The difference in our pay is astounding and I think it's time we take action!

no one could give less of a fuck about the environment, because it just gets in the way of the REAL work of the agency, which is building dams or roads, or dislocating Indian tribes, or tearing down neighborhoods, or whatever. So part of my job is to MAKE IT APPEAR that the agency is doing everything humanly possible to comply with our many state, county, and federal environmental regulations, while in ACTUALITY I have to minimize or downright quash or at best find a nice convenient loophole to get around any real environmental problems and hope they don't hit the light of day.

It isn't just my agency that does this. They *all* do it. I know this because I have to work with them all.

But that's just part of it. Part of it is the way you lose your job skills through over-specialization, so that after a couple of years you're as useless on the job market as a dodo bird. Part of it is the crummy and demoralizing work atmosphere. Part of it is being as a "professional" and finding out a computer program could probably do your job... with a good deal less anguish to all concerned. And part of it is the total illogicality of the red tape itself, which somehow transcends mere human pettiness, and becomes something awesome and immovable, like a glacier.

I once figured out that to do my job according to the book, following all the procedures, would take 32 working days per item. Then I figured out how many were allowed me by all the time limits in the system. 15 working days. So I HAVE to do my job wrong in order to follow the rules. Theoretically, what I'm doing should take thought, analysis, independent judgment, and professional standards. But I don't HAVE THE TIME. If you have 15 days to do a 32 day-job, you don't have time to think. You have time to use buzz-words and recycled phrases from other documents. Then

PHOTO BY WILLIE THE RAT

PROC. WRLD. CO [CKT] AIL*/"..PART-4!".

this stuff gets unloaded on the unfortunate public and they complain about gobbledygook. No wonder!

It took me about a year to figure out why government has the lousiest reputation in the world. Then I realized it's because they're denied even the elemental satisfaction of doing a good job. The politics change too fast. They change the rules in the middle of the project. Things you write, work on for months, disappear and you never see them again. Original thought is about as welcome as a nun in a whorehouse. So after a while you drop out spiritually. You have to keep going there to pay the rent and feed the kids. But nothing in the world can induce you to feel involved, or God forbid, responsible.

Needless to say, this is not very good for you.

That's why I spend as much of my working time as possible drunk or stoned. When you're drunk, you don't feel. When you're stoned, you at least have a handle on what's going on. You can watch your mind go CRUNCH as you step in from the sunny streets into the dull, stale-smelling building. You can see everybody avoiding eye contact. You see how damn programmed everybody is, sitting at their desks, trying to or pretending to work. Not thinking. Daydreaming about the next 3-day weekend. Thinking about that glorious day when they'll be too old to work.

You watch people deteriorate. Like in any other institution, the longer you stay there, the crazier you get. The 25-year-olds look at each other with terror in their eyes, as the possibility occurs to them that they may be there the rest of their lives. Just like a prison. Or an insane asylum. Except we're respectable. We're government workers.

—THEMIS, that complaining bitch over on the fifth floor

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Adventures In GOOD GROOMING

by Freddie Baer

Wake-Up

The alarm jolted Joan awake at 6:30 AM, scattering her dreams. Grabbing the clock and hurling it across the room, she listened with a certain amount of satisfaction as it crunched against the wall. Joan threw herself back into the pillows in search of her now lost dreams but was unable to fall back asleep.

Groaning, Joan got up, splashed around in the shower, dried herself off, and drew a brush through her hair. She put on the coffee and pushed some bread into the toaster, and then settled down to the unpleasant task of dressing for work.

A dress was pulled out of the closet that was almost matronly in length and lack of color. It was, of course, high-necked. Joan remembered the last time she wore a vaguely low cut dress to work. Sam White, one of the vice-presidents of the company, had come up behind her while she was typing and practically drooled into her cleavage. Never again, she thought. Next came the Llegs' pantyhose (cheaper, you know, when you buy five) and sensible shoes with the low, low heels. . .

Joan was dressed in tight, tight black leather with pants that laced up on either side, exposing flesh. Her top also laced up, this time in front, and her nipples played peek-a-boo. A pair of high, high stiletto boots added a good six inches to her height, and she held a very nasty looking cat o' nine tails in one hand. Facing her across the room stood a naked Sam White.

"Oh Mistress," he plaintively cried, "I'll be your slave forever! Just hurt me!"

"Forever?" she asked, "Isn't that a long, long time?" punctuating the question with a blow from her whip.

"Yes! Yes!" he whimpered, "Forever!" as he fell to the floor on his back, squirming in pleasure.

Placing her foot on his chest, she said, "Forever's just a moment in the infinity of time," and dug her heel into his heart.

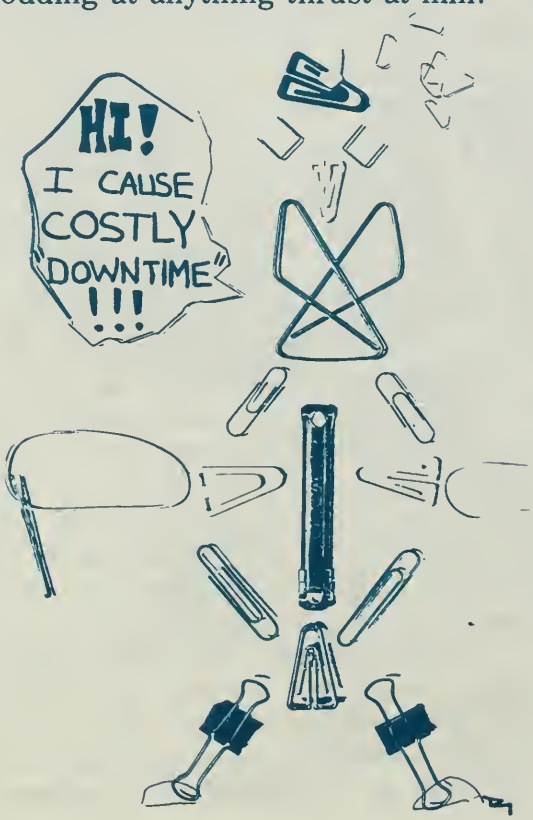
Acrid smoke filled the room, making Joan cough; the toaster was on the blink again. "Looks like no time for a sit down breakfast this morning," she thought as she pulled the blackened

bread from the toaster. She wondered if you could get cancer from eating charcoaled toast.

Bus Ride

"Late again," Joan thought as she sprinted the two blocks to the bus stop. That bitch, Missy Hogan, the office manager, was sure to say something about it. She arrived at the stop just as a bus was pulling out. The driver ignored her blows to the side of the bus and continued on his way. Cursing, Joan leaned up against a light pole and waited for the next bus. Minutes ticked by — her stomach rumbled, a crowd grew at the stop, and still no bus.

Just as Joan was considering walking and/or suicide, a bus arrived. At once people dived for the opening door; the air was filled with jostling elbows and excuse mes. It appeared that everyone at that bus stop was late for work. Joan got on the bus, flashing her half of a fast pass at the driver. Luckily, he was numbed out, his eyes fastened on the road ahead, nodding at anything thrust at him.



All the seats were taken so Joan braced herself in the aisle by the back door for easy escape. She studied her fellow passengers; miserable and tired, they resembled characters from a Hieronymus Bosch painting. She chuckled to herself; her vision of hell consisted of Satan being a bureaucrat and Joan his one-girl office with a 24 hour day, a seven day week, and no paid vacations. (The only perk was all the coffee you could drink, but then there were no toilet breaks.)

The bus lurched forward; more people jammed on at every stop. Just as Joan thought the bus could hold no more, the doors would open, and the crush would increase. She looked out the window; a horde of people surrounded the bus, looking at their watches and howling to be let on. Pushing the doors open, they stampeded onto the bus; Joan fell to the floor, her body mangled by feet. The crowd continued to surge forward; there was breaking glass, and arms and legs and heads stuck out of the bus windows. People still squeezed on. The bus finally could hold no more; groaning metal was heard, then the bus exploded like a rotten tomato being hurled against a wall. Bodies flew everywhere.

Joan found herself being pushed out the door; the bus had arrived downtown, and it was time to be vomited out.

The Office

Joan swung the office door open, twenty minutes late. Missy's head popped out of her cubicle, glancing at the clock. "You're late again, Joan. That's the third time in the last two weeks. I'd thought that talk we had regarding your tardiness would make an impression. Certainly, docking your pay a half hour will!" Missy smiled viciously.

Joan shuffled her feet and grinned weakly in an apologetic manner but thought, "Die bitch." Rent was due

that week, and she was short already! She hurriedly went to her cubicle. She draped her coat over her chair rather than check it in her locker in back; to have done so would have notified others to her late arrival. . .Not that Missy wouldn't eventually. Missy would use anything to make herself

Carol Riggle, sculptor and xerographer

look good so the small group of workers under her were continually tyrannized.

Joan was a shit worker, plain and simple. She had been trained in a variety of tasks and so, like an adding machine, she could be moved from one department to another. No one thought she actually did anything, but there was always a demand for her talents.

Making Coffee

"Joan, if you have nothing to do now," Charlene asked, knowing damn well she had tons to do, "could you make the coffee for this morning's Executive Meeting?"

"Sure thing, Charlene, right away!" replied Joan, also knowing that if she refused, Missy would hear about her unco-operative behavior.

Joan walked into the coffee room; some asshole had finished the last cup of the pot, leaving the dregs to slowly cook down. She grabbed the pot, rinsed out the pieces of loose crud, filled it with water, and placed it on the hot plate.

The water was not getting hot fast enough. She looked around the coffee room for materials to burn, grabbed napkins and coffee filters, and set them on fire around the pot. She chortled to herself and gleefully ran from room to room, gathering material to burn. Computer reports, personnel files, "Business Week" magazines, all were thrown into the flames.

The pot became a bubbling cauldron. She threw in the grounds, murmuring spells and incantations, and levitated the cauldron into the air. She floated it to the executive boardroom; gusts of howling winds flung the doors open at her command. The cauldron poured, scalding the entire administrative staff to death.

"Joan! Where the hell's that coffee?!" Charlene called. Joan mumbled something about having to make it and poured the hot water through the ground coffee. After Charlene left the room, Joan heaved a great gob of phlegm into her throat and spit several times into the coffee.

Mail Opening

Joan started opening the mail. Since it was Monday, there were more letters, bills, resumes, and magazines than usual; the company used to have an envelope-opening machine, but when it broke down, *they* never bothered to repair it, and so she was stuck with using a hand letter opener. Swish went the blade as she inserted it under the flap of an envelope and viciously ripped the paper asunder. The metal opener gleamed in the sun. . .

She was wearing white — all white. Her white patent leather maryjane shoes, her white crocheted tights, her white lacy frock with the puffed sleeves, even her pigtails were held in

white satin bows. She was holding the letter opener in her hand. It had become quite sharp. She quietly strolled up behind Missy's desk, twirled her chair around and expertly cut Missy's throat with the letter opener from one end to the other: a wide gaping smile of a wound. Missy gurgled in astonishment and expired. Blood, however, splattered everywhere, soaking her white dress, dripping on her white shoes, pinkening her white hair ribbons. She tskked to herself and set about dissecting Missy. She took off Missy's career girl uniform (of course, an Evan Picone suit with tailored blouse), removed her Joseph Magnin pumps and Hane's pantyhose, and stripped off her matching Vassarette bra and panties. Joan then took the letter opener and laid Missy open from her sternum to her pelvis. Very neatly, she removed Missy's internal organs: heart, lungs, stomach, liver, and the rest, and alphabetically filed them away.

"Damn," Joan thought, catching the tips of her fingers on an envelope flap, "another fucking paper cut." She got up with a flurry and headed to the john to wash her wounds.

At the Water Cooler

Her stomach flopped over twice and then played dead. Joan had eaten her lunch at her desk while working (if you can call stamping invoices "Entered" working), hoping that Missy would notice and add that half-hour back on to her pay check. The avocado-cheese and-sprouts sandwich which had seemed so appetizing as she made it the night before had become almost inedible. The advocado had turned black, the cheese moldy, the bread dry, and the sprouts wilted. She was positive that she had gotten food poisoning from the unrefrigerated mayonnaise.

Her stomach lurched again and she staggered to the file drawer that doubled as a medicine cabinet. The only stomach remedy was Alka Seltzer, left over from the time Fred Herren, the head of personnel, had insisted his secretary fetch it to cure his hangover.

"Any port in a storm," Joan thought, ripping open the tin foil envelope and plopping the tablets into her cup. She walked over to the water cooler and slowly filled her cup. The cool blue of the distilled water caught her eye.

The water was warm as Joan swam. Tropical fish darted in front of her mask, making her gasp at their colors. She wore nothing under her wet suit; the way the thick rubber molded itself on her body felt good. She breathed steadily, deeply, kicking her fins to propel herself further into this paradise.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed a dark, ominous shape swimming towards her. A shark: she recognized the beady,

bloodshot eyes of Fred Herren and quickly gripped her spear gun. As if in slow motion, she turned and steadied the gun. As the Fred shark came closer, she pulled the trigger. The spear shot out, hitting it in the eye. Again, she kicked, this time towards the surface as the dying Fred sank twitching towards the bottom.

She suddenly felt wet and realized that the seltzer had overflowed the cup onto her hand. She downed what was left of the cure and went to get some rags to clean up the mess.

Entering

Later afternoon found Joan as usual in front of a CRT terminal, entering address updates to the company's vendor list. Nearby was Katy, another shit worker, entering sales information on another CRT. She was new; Joan and she had never exchanged much more than the perfunctory hellos and goodbyes, and now she seemed immersed in her work.

Joan sat at the terminal, mindlessly filling in the blanks in the screen. Not much variation in this project, the codes were A for add, M for modify, D for delete and C for cancel, in case she fucked up; then, update information and punch enter. Great fun.

She was a worker ant, scuttling back and forth from where an avocado sandwich laid to her nest. Surrounding her were other ants; together, they formed a steady stream to and from the sandwich. She was heading back to the nest, carrying a crumb when suddenly a towering foot appeared out of nowhere, crushing several of her companions. It was joined by another; then all was still again. Together she and some of the other ants ran up the nearest foot, past the shoe and sox to bare skin, and started pinching flesh. Incredibly loud howls started, and Joan was flattened by a swatting hand.

"Hey Joan," Katy called from across the room. "Have you ever felt like a worker ant, carrying bits of information back and forth?"

Joan's jaw dropped, and she hit the abort key instead of the enter key, causing all her work for that afternoon to be lost forever in the process.

Home Again

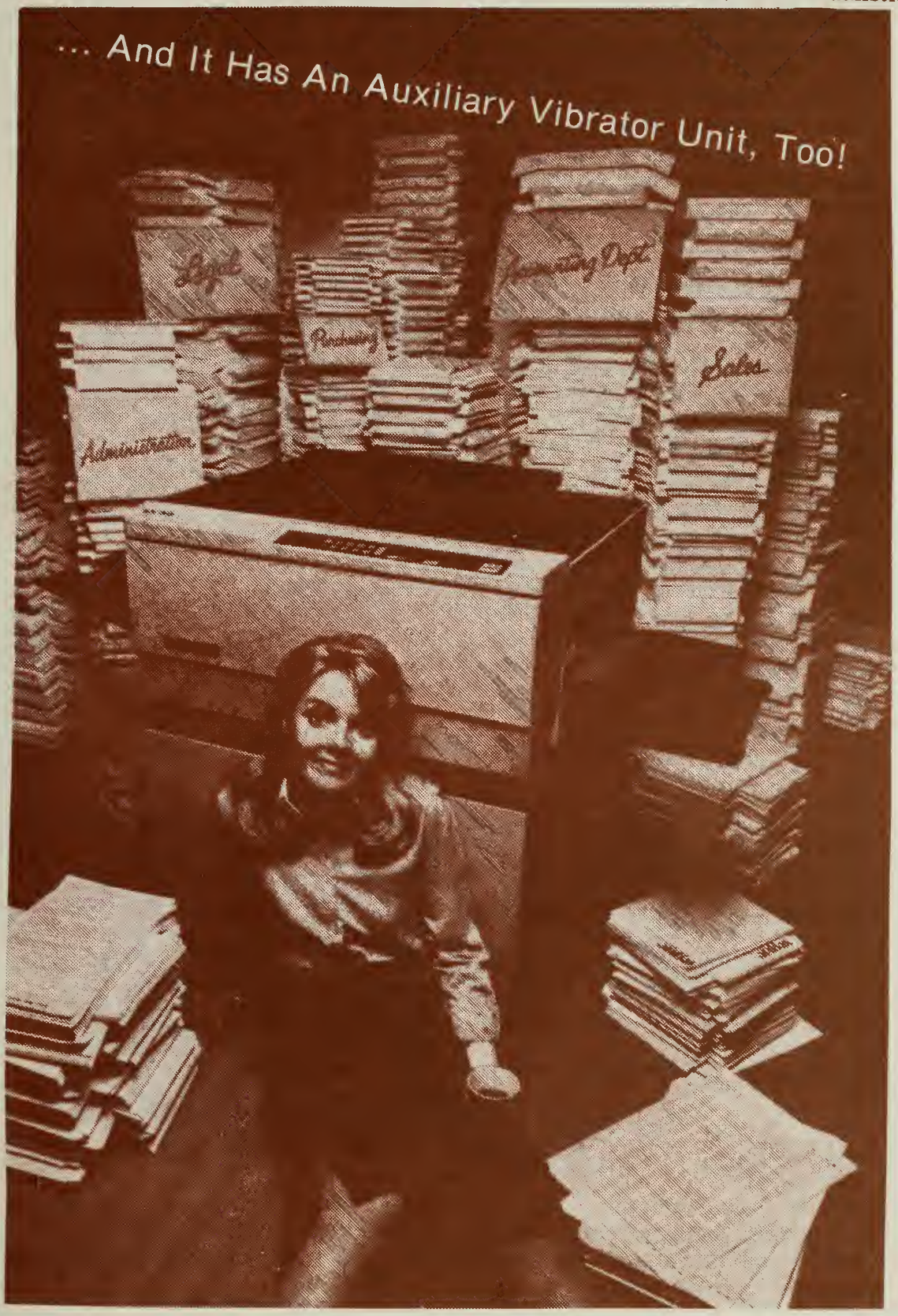
Joan looked contentedly out her living room window at the lights of the downtown buildings. It had been a good evening. Katy and she had dinner after work and rode the bus home together, talking all the while about their respective fantasies. It seemed that they shared quite a few. While they were talking on the bus, other passengers had contributed their fantasies too, breaking down the usual wall of silence. Even the bus driver chimed in with a few of her own. (The one of taking everyone on a rush hour bus to a picnic in the park was exceptionally good.)

Joan was with a crowd of people, surrounded by friends and lovers. They had gathered on a hill overlooking the city; it was night. Several people, including Joan, held watches in their hands; together they watched the time.

At midnight the explosives they had planted at the foundations of the now abandoned downtown office buildings would go off. The second hand of the watches finally nudged 12 o'clock; numerous explosions rocked the city below. An ominous silence followed as the lights of the high rises went out. The outlines of the buildings wavered for a moment, then slowly, deliciously, collapsed in upon themselves. A heavy cloud of dust arose from the ruins as did a cheer from the hilltop.

Suddenly, there was a loud rap on Joan's front door. Joan quickly turned from her window and started to cross her living room, but before she reached the front door, its wood splintered as a foot smashed open the lock. Joan drew back in horror as three men with guns drawn shoul-

dered their way into the room. They backed her against a wall. One of them flashed a badge at her, shouting, "Mind Police!" She stared at him as though he was insane; he continued, "We've been monitoring *your* thoughts for a long time. As long as they were harmless, individualistic



fantasies, we would let you amuse yourself, but now that you're thinking about getting together with other people to do something. . .Well, we can't allow that."

With that, he drew out a pair of handcuffs and began to fasten them on Joan's wrists. It was then his turn to stare at her as she doubled over in laughter. She righted herself and looked intensely at them. "Fantasies," she said, "are very powerful things. When you use them to your advantage, they can become reality."

The three men shimmered under her glance and then were gone. Joan looked at her hands, and the cuffs vanished, then at the door, and the damage repaired itself. Smiling to herself, Joan crossed the room to the phone. She would call up Katy, she decided, and tell her that their plans for the future would only be limited by their imaginations.

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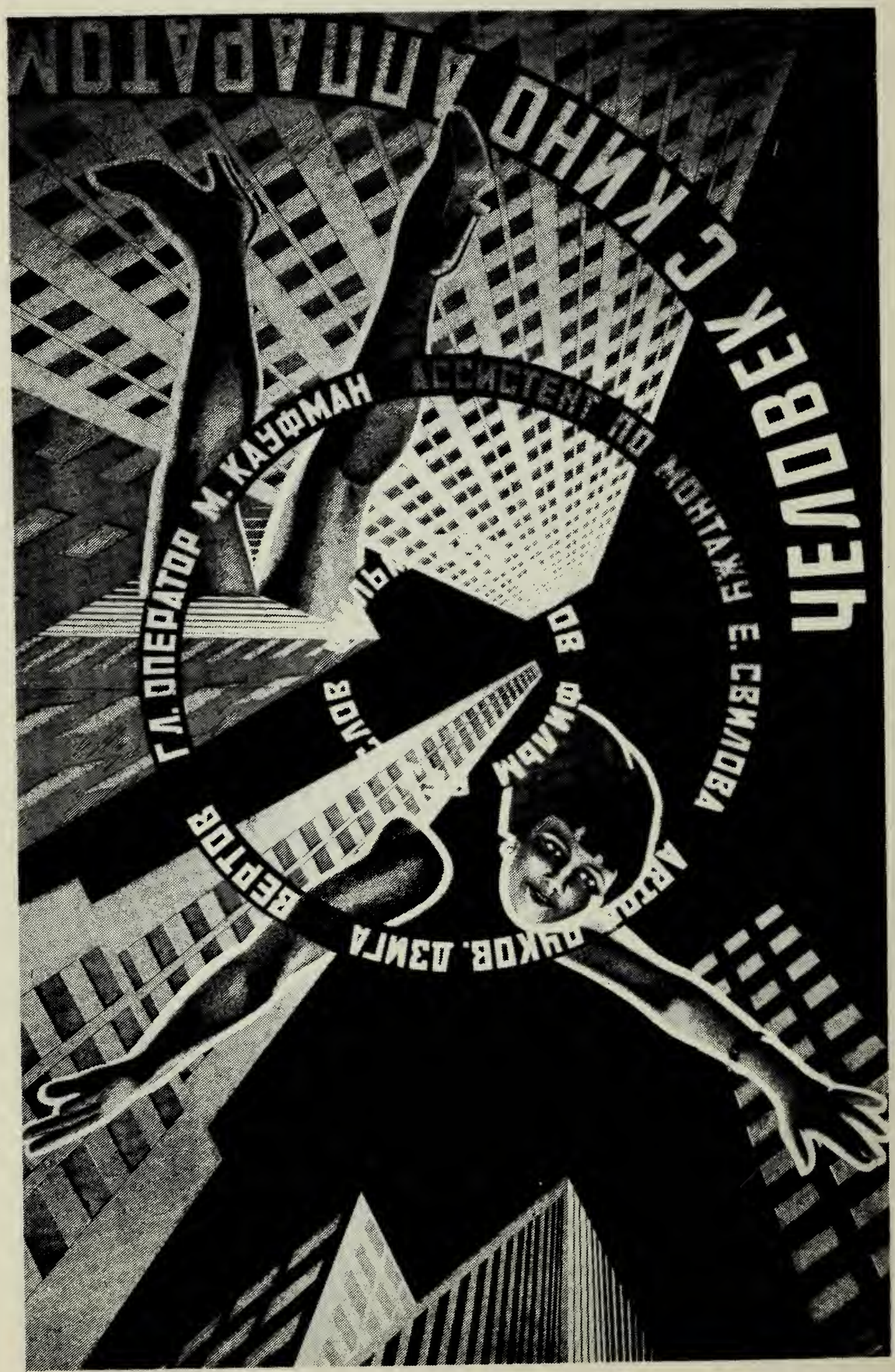

Man With A Movie Camera — Sternberg Bros.